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Christ and Men

W. Y. FULLERTON



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By W. Y. FULLERTON

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CHRIST AND MEN

*STUDIES IN THE HUMAN SIDE
OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE*

SERMONS BY

W. Y. FULLERTON

AUTHOR OF "GOD'S JEWELS, THEIR DIGNITY AND DESTINY,"
"GOSPEL PICTURES IN BIBLE STORIES," "A FINGER-
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I

OUR ATTITUDE TO CHRIST

“He that is not against us is for us.”—LUKE ix. 50.

“He that is not with Me is against Me.”—LUKE xi. 23.

THESE two texts do not say the same thing. There are some who think that they say opposite things. The truth is that they say different things under the same general form.

They refer of course to the great class of people that we might label “Nondescript.” There are some men who are declared disciples of Jesus Christ about whom we can have no doubt, their life adds weight to their testimony, and we are sure they are Christian ; there are some others who are as evidently against Christ—such a man as Voltaire, for instance, to go a long way back for an example. But what of the great horde between, that seems to be neither for nor against, that maintains an attitude of unconcern or indifference, people about whom there is something to be admired while there is much to be reprobated ? Do they form a third class ?

The two rules given to us by the Lord Jesus will enable us to settle the question. Let us apply them.

I. EVERY MAN IS FOR CHRIST OR AGAINST HIM.

Both texts agree in asserting that there are but two sides.

However people may differ, however difficult it may be to pass a judgment upon them, there are but two classes. Some are for and some are against Christ. Let us understand that perfectly. There are not three classes, the great crowd between does not form a third company. A great man has instanced these two texts to prove his statement that men are not like the squares on a chess-board, either black or white; he asserts that there are some men who are neither, that there is no sharp dividing line which severs men, that there are many who may be represented by a half-tone. Half of his statement is true; men are not like the squares on a chess-board, either black or white, there is a gradation between the two extremes. But the other half of the statement is false, there are not three classes; and that is the very thing these texts do not say. It is the illustration that is at fault; and though it is always dangerous to argue from an illustration, I suggest another which I think is nearer the mark. Men are like the two hemispheres: there are only two, one is in light and the other in darkness, there is that absolute difference at this moment between them; but the dark hemisphere is not all dark and the light hemisphere is not all light, there is here the dawn and there the evening twilight; yet there are only two, and the fact that the light merges into the darkness and the darkness into the light does not contradict that in the least.

The Bible is the only Book, and Christ is the only Teacher that has divided men in this way. Men have divided their fellows on the ground of language, of colour, of race, into I know not how many different and varying groups : it has been left to our Lord to declare the only true distinction among us. Some are for Christ, some are against Christ ; some just, some unjust. That is the distinction as high as heaven and as deep as hell. Is that clear ? Then on which side are you ?

Every man is in some relation to Christ.

This must be so since He is our Maker. It is in vain for any man to imagine that he can live without taking up any attitude. It is doubly impossible when we remember that Christ is a Man and that every man must therefore bear some relation to Him. And He is not a Man shadowy and far forgotten in ancient days : He is alive, he walks among us by His Spirit, and daily we are being challenged as to our attitude towards Him and towards His claims. It is impossible for us to escape a decision.

It must be so because of Christ's absolute claim.

He asks for our whole allegiance and He has the right to claim it. You must either allow the claim or deny it. There can be no mistake as to the issue. In France I am told that occasionally they have a three-cornered duel ; any sort of a duel is a curious piece of human folly, but this seems to be folly incarnate. The three men take places as on an equilateral triangle, and fire each at each other round the line. It would be difficult in that case to say whether this man is against that man or not, for there is the third man, who is

perhaps his real opponent. But here there is no third man, there are only Christ and you. When a sovereign claims loyalty there is only one alternative ; it is impossible to be both loyal and disloyal ; impossible to be neither. If you object to the simile and say that a man in Britain might escape a decision because he might belong to another nation, I reply that where Christ is concerned there can be no other nation. He is King of all the earth, and you are either His subject or you are a rebel.

Christ's own teaching asserts this.

When He began His ministry He declared there were but two sorts of men : those who heard His word were like a man who built upon a rock, those who refused it were like a man building on the sand : there were but two classes, the wise and the foolish builders. At the end He made the same statement, He had not enlarged or changed His doctrine because of His intercourse with the people. He said some were wise and some were foolish : some took oil with their lamps, and some took lamps without oil. Wise and foolish virgins ! only these two. If there is yet any doubt He declares that in the day of His glory the nations shall be separated into sheep and goats : some on the right hand, some on the left. Christ has no third hand, there is no third class. "He that is not against us is for us." "He that is not with Me is against Me."

This is true of every man and of all time.

There never was a man of whom this was not true ; there never is a time in any life when it is not true. You cannot hold yourself in solution. You cannot walk

out of the house without voting. You are not a cypher, you are a unit and you count as a unit either for or against Christ.

Life is not to be judged by its accidents, but by its trend and tenour. Reverting to the illustration of the hemispheres:—in one there is absolute darkness, in the other absolute light; but between the two in two places there is a half-light, there is both a dawn and a gloaming. To which hemisphere do those half-lights belong? The answer is, of course, that they belong to both, some to one, some to another. How are we to distinguish? There is at this moment a spot on the earth where the twilight is brighter than is the dawn in another place. Do you say that that twilight belongs to the day because it is brighter, and the dawn belongs to night because it is less bright? Would you dare to say that? Man, it is not so: the morning dawn, however misty, belongs to the day, and the evening twilight, however bright, belongs to the night. Infallibly so, for the question is not which is brighter, any more than the question about men is which is at the moment better; the question is: *Which way are they going?* Is that spot of the earth spinning towards the sun or away from it? Is this man getting nearer Christ, or drifting further off?

There are some unbelievers who lead better lives than some Christian people. It is a great pity that it is so, but there are many things to be taken into account. If you say, however, that this well-behaved unbeliever is a better Christian than this faulty professor, I deny it. He is not a Christian at all (though perhaps he comes

of Christian ancestry and owes much of his morality to that); he is in the twilight, and the twilight, however bright, belongs as absolutely to the night as the dawn, however dim, belongs to the day.

When a man is translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, it is like the dawning of the day. The sun rises crimson behind the bars of cloud that have shut in the night, and the man, ashamed of his past, blushes for it: his soul crimson with modesty; the blood of Jesus suffuses him with its cleansing glow. These are the morning beams that lead to a golden day. And when a man rejects Christ it is like the evening sunset that flares in the west, token that the day is deepening to the night, the ruddy fires but the prelude of the eternal burning.

In this the two texts agree, but they do not agree in everything. The one is a negative rule—"He that is not against us is for us"; the other is positive—"He that is not with Me is against Me." When are we to apply the one and when the other?

II. SOMETIMES WE JUDGE NEGATIVELY.

When we judge other people.

When we find those who are not against us we may count them as on our side. You recollect the incident. John saw one who cast out devils in the name of Jesus and he forbade him because he did not follow his company. The Master's answer was, "Forbid him not." Let us enlarge our charity about others. We mourn that we only are left to follow the true faith; God rebukes us and says that He has ten thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Do not apply this rule to

yourself, a stricter law there prevails. But as I look on this congregation I say, "There and there is a man who is not against Christ. I will reckon him as on Christ's side."

It is a judgment for the meantime.

Until I know whether the semi-light is dawn or twilight, I will say "at least it is not darkness." That man comes to the service, he sings God's praise, he is not indifferent; true he has not confessed Christ and his life is far from perfect; still he is interested, perhaps he is inquiring: he is not against us—give him time. At present he does not oppose, and that is something. Ultimately a severer test will be applied, and the time will come perhaps when I may apply it. For instance, Erasmus and Warham seemed at first to be on the side of the Reformation, they stood as aloof from the opponents as from the advocates of the Evangelical doctrine. Luther would have been entitled to reckon them on his side, until the course of events revealed them in their true colours. "He that is not against us is for us"—a judgment for the meantime.

And for those outside our company.

It is possible that men may not conform to our ways, nor join our denomination and yet not be against us. Then they are for us. It is possible to be outside the bounds of our organisation, of any organisation, and yet be for Christ. That was the case with the man whom John forbade. Christ does not say that it is right to be away from the body of His disciples and to be unknown to them: He does not lead us to suppose that is a matter of indifference; He only states a fact. It is possible for a man to be against *me* and yet for *us*: two soldiers

in the army may be at war with each other and yet both be fighting for the Queen. They may have the rivalry of different regiments and yet be on the same side in the battle. My charity must recognise that a man who is apart from me may be true to Christ.

Any one against what we are against, is for us.

All who seek to cast out devils are so far for us; those who seek to make men chaste and sober and honest, to give men liberty or light, are for us. "Sorry to see you," said a clergyman to Whitfield on his second visit to Boston — "sorry to see you here again." To which Mr. Whitfield replied, "So is the devil, sir." When the devil is sorry we may be glad, and any man who can cast out demons is not our opponent. Devils are uncommonly good judges of Christian character: you remember that the seven sons of Sceva sought to cast one out by using the Sacred Name, and they got the bitter answer, "Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are ye?" More than a lip knowledge of Jesus is needed to conquer Satan, and more than mere moral essays are needed to make man good. Even a Unitarian minister has lately told us that "mere ethical teaching is anti-Christian: to teach morals alone is exactly the opposite of what Christ did." It takes more than that to drive out devils, therefore those who can cast them out may safely be reckoned as for us. Oh! that you men who try to help your fellows and who have not yet laid hold on Christ would cease cutting yourself off from the only source of power! If you are not in touch with Christ in your work you will in time declare yourself against Him.

Those who honour the name of Jesus are for us.

The blessed name is strangely honoured in these days ; when it is a mere catch-word of course it is meaningless, but when men get glints of light and claim Jesus as their leader, it is not ours to condemn. "There is no man who shall do a miracle in My name that can lightly speak evil of Me" was part of the Master's answer, as we find it written in the ninth chapter of Mark—"for he that is not against us is on our part." "Some indeed preach Christ of envy and strife. What then? Notwithstanding every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached ; and I therein do rejoice. Yea, and will rejoice."

So far stretches the rule of charity.

III. BUT SOMETIMES WE ARE TO JUDGE POSITIVELY.

Ultimately for all men and immediately for ourselves. Duty and not charity is the rule. *It is not a passive but an active support Christ demands, not a hidden but an open and unashamed allegiance.*

At the end all will be asked, and therefore at once you should ask yourself, not whether you do not oppose Christ, but whether you are actually *for* Him, *with* Him. There comes a time in every life—indeed, many times—when this cannot be shirked. If the battle is thousands of miles away you need not, perhaps, declare your sentiments ; but when it is at the gate you must reveal yourself : to be silent is to be a traitor—inaction is treason. You cannot always sit quiet or have the benefit of the doubt. The battle has come to the gate now, and you are face to face with the question ; if you are unable now to declare your allegiance to Christ, you are against Him.

Some years ago, at a West-end house, there was a dinner-party, and after the ladies had withdrawn from the dining-room the conversation among the men took a turn which I fear it not infrequently takes under similar circumstances. Language that would not have been tolerated in the presence of the ladies was freely used, and at last some coarse jest was made which held Christ up to derision. A gentleman in that company rose with perfect self-possession and rang the bell; when it was answered he ordered his carriage, and to the expostulations of the guests who had come to meet him he gave answer, "Gentlemen, I am still a Christian." That man was Sir Robert Peel, Premier of England; he felt that silence in such a case would have been to deny his Master. He would have been against Christ if he had not taken action for Him, would he not?

You say that you have no carriage to order and no chance to make such a noble stand. Probably you will have an opportunity to-morrow as appropriate to your ability. Here is a case from the East End. An old stevedore at the docks was constantly grieved by the blasphemy of his master. One day he raised his hat when the name of Jesus was taken in vain. The master swore again, and again the old man lifted his hat. Another oath, and once more the hat was removed, while the master glared at him. The next time the hat was moved he could stand it no longer, and with another oath he said—

"You old fool you! what are you taking off your hat to me for?"

"I am not taking it off to you, sir," the old man replied, "but to the holy name you are blaspheming."

He was for Christ. Are you prepared to take your stand like that? I would like to drive it home to you: if you are not for Christ out and out, through and through, you are against Him.

All true loyalty to Christ must be personal to Him.

It is not enough to be attached to His people, not enough to admire good things, not enough even to reverence God. "All heretics," says Luther, "set themselves against Christ. It is the Sun they shoot at." It is not enough to stand up for truth and righteousness. Do you stand up for Him? Are you prepared to stand by Him through thick and thin? You may not be able to do much for Him, but you must give Him your personal devotion. I like the action of that old American woman at the time of the Civil War; when the regiment mustered from her town she marched behind it with a poker over her shoulder.

"My good woman," they said, "you can't fight with a poker."

"No," she answered, "but I can show whose side I'm on."

To be without Christ, even though you are free of the unclean spirit, is to court disaster.

Having stated the principle, "He that is not with Me is against Me," Christ went on to give the incident of the unclean spirit leaving the man and returning with eight-fold force. Read the whole passage in the eleventh chapter of Luke. If the house is empty, so far from casting out devils from others, you are giving them a standing invitation to enter your own life. The house may be swept, but it must be washed; it may be gar-

nished, but it must be inhabited. Even a beautiful life, if not yielded to Christ, is against Him, and will at length be the prey of evil. An empty house perishes of its own accord.

To be against Christ is to be spoiled.

However strong the strong man, and however well jointed his armour, there is One stronger than he, and that Stronger shall win. For those who have yielded to Him, He overcame the Adversary and spoiled him. He will do the like for His own adversaries, and if you are one of them He will overwhelm you. He will conquer you or conquer for you, which you will. He can subdue the devil for you. He can so order the circumstances of your life that, however bad a tangle you may have made of it, you shall yet be able to rise in the strength He gives you, and serve Him.

Do not, therefore, soothe yourself by saying, "I am not against Christ," as if that were sufficient. The time for that is past. Are you unreservedly, irreversibly, affectionately, and eternally for Him? Do you declare yourself?

Now comes the great point of decision. As Christ was crucified between the penitent and the impenitent, He still divides men into two classes. I ask again, Do you declare yourself as Christ's disciple, trusting in the merit of His death for redemption, and ready to live all your life according to His will? If not, whatever you may think of others, you are bound to say about yourself, "Woe is me, I am against Him." Ponder it well.

Against Him who loved and died! You say, "I join

the crowd that cried, 'Crucify! crucify'! they wounded Thee on earth, I wound Thee again; my clenched fist I strike on Thy face."

Against Him who lives and yearns over you! Who would take you to His heart and keep you there for ever!

Against Him who is coming to judge you! O man, be not so mad. What will you do when you stand before that Great White Throne?

Against Him from whom is all good! You profess to love that which is lovely, and yet you despise the fount from which it all flows.

Against Him who wishes to be against your enemies! You fight them and fail, and yet oppose Him who would make you more than conqueror.

Change it all to-day!

Say on the one hand, "O thou spirit that now workest in the children of disobedience, thou malignant one who hast long misled me, no longer will I be thy thrall, I give myself over to Christ, and I am against thee now and for ever. Dost thou hear? I am against thee."

Then turn to Christ and say, "O Christ, Thou who didst come to me in my misery, who didst die for my sins, who art here by my side, too long have I been against Thee, too long have I been content to despise Thy claim. I am not worthy to be Thine, but in my sin I come. I fall at Thy blessed feet, and now at length I am for Thee, and by Thy grace I shall be for Thee evermore."

II

HOW CHRIST AND MEN MEET

“They all murmured, saying, That He was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.”—LUKE xix. 7.

THIS is one of several notable sayings about Christ snatched from the lips of His enemies. Once before they said, “This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them,” and these words spoken in contempt we bind to our hearts for ever. When our Lord was on the tree they thought to make an end of His claim to the Messiahship when they flung at Him the taunt, “He saved others, Himself He cannot save.” We take these words and glory in them as the chief evidence of His grace and power. In this case you can almost see the shrug of the shoulders that went with the disdainful comment; here was an end to the wonder of the day, the Great Rabbi had actually gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. This is what Christ has ever done. He is a Saviour worthy of our trust, our enemies themselves being witness.

I want you to look at three things. First, how this

man met this Guest ; secondly, how this Guest met this man ; and thirdly, how this Guest and this man met this sinner.

I. HOW THIS MAN MET THIS GUEST.

He met Him in spite of his riches. It is a hard thing for a rich man to enter the kingdom. We are told that in the previous chapter ; the Master says it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. On which a celebrated writer has observed, that he wishes there was on record a case of a camel going through a needle's eye just for the sake of the rich men, you know. But if that be missing, here the harder thing is done—a rich man goes through the strait gate. But he went in spite of his riches, not because of them ; wealth never helps any man to Christ or to heaven. If you have no riches, thank God you have one obstacle the less.

He met this Guest, too, in spite of his littleness. If there is one thing pathetic about men after their sin it is dwarfishness. They live so near the earth and rise so little towards heaven. Their thoughts are so petty, their ways so poor. But though men are so small, it need not keep them from Christ. Here is a case in point.

He met Him in spite of the crowd. To a tall man a crowd does not so much matter. When there is to be a pageant in the streets, I do not need to take up a place on the kerbstone an hour before the time, I can easily see over the heads of three or four rows of ordinary people. But to a little man a crowd is fatal, especially a crowd of tall men. Take care, you tall men, you men of strong character, you men who are made to be leaders, take care that you do not get in the way of some of these

dwarfs who are seeking to see Jesus, lest by and by they rise up and say, "But for you I should have seen Him. You came in my way, you hindered." Zacchæus could not see Christ because of the press. I am almost tempted to make a pun. Will you forgive me? Many fail to see Christ to-day because of the press—I mean the printing press. They read the anonymous articles of the newspapers that decry our faith, and almost put them on a level with the Scriptures. If they saw the men who write these essays in unbelief they would attach less importance to them. If they read their Bible more and the newspapers a little less there might be more chance of them getting to know the Saviour of the world.

How, then, did this man meet this Guest?

By getting away from the crowd. This is your only chance. If you would have the interview with the Lord Jesus, without which you cannot be saved, you must get away from the crowd: from the business, the pleasure, the politics, the rush of things round about you. Fly! Fly! But from what sort of crowd? Had you been at Jericho that day and listened to the talk of these people, you would have heard them speak of Jesus. *It was a religious crowd.* To see Jesus to-day there is nothing we need more than to get away from the religious crowd. If we knew less of ministers and churches we would probably know more of Christ. Instead of that we miss the essentials, because of our familiarity with the externals.

By climbing the tree. On the roadside there was a tree—a sycamine fig tree, with branches at right-angles, and broad, spreading leaves semi-transparent from the

upper side, that would form a screen and yet not hinder him seeing what went on below. Up he climbed. If there are many things to hinder, thank God there are some things to help the true seeker. Your mother's memory is like a tree growing by your path, the biography of that saint in which you were so greatly interested, the life of that godly man, these are like trees to lift you up to gain a sight of Jesus. These things cannot save you, but they can help you to see Him who can.

This is how this man met this Guest.

II. HOW THIS GUEST MET THIS MAN?

He saw him. Zacchæus went out to see Jesus. We do not read that he saw Him. Of course we know he did, but that is not what is said. It is written, "Jesus came to the place and saw him." Love is quicker-sighted than curiosity. Jesus saw Zacchæus, and Jesus sees you. The faintest trembling of desire after Him is not hidden from Him. He sees you as you never saw yourself, as nobody else ever saw you. He sees the real man. He looks you through and through. In spite of all the disguises, He sees you, through all the leaves that hide you, behind the smiling face He sees the heart filled with anguish, behind your respectable exterior He knows all about the great crimson blot on your life, and yet in spite of all He calls you.

He called him. I always wonder the seeker did not fall from the branch when the startling call was given, "Zacchæus, come down!" He was not only seen but known. How could this man know his name? What did He want him for? Now mark. He climbed the

tree to see Jesus ; he had to come down to receive Him. Aye, and if you would have this tremendous interview with Christ you must do two things : you must first get away from the things that hinder, leave the crowd behind you ; and then you must get away from the things that help. Forget those other good men, come away even from the thought of your mother's prayers, and then, face to face, meet Christ alone, as if you and He were the only two in all the universe. An interview like that will never be forgotten. It will change and charge your whole life. Leave behind the things that help as well as the things that hinder. Forget even this service, the people round you, even the man that speaks to you, and think only of Jesus Christ.

He hastened him. "Zacchæus, make haste !" Christ knew perfectly well He was going to spend that night in Jericho. What reason, then, was there for haste ? As regards time, there was no reason, but as regards opportunity every reason. It was of the first importance that while he was startled out of himself he should meet the Saviour. And for you, as I hope you will live long, there may possibly be no reason of time why you should be hastened in the search for Christ (of course there may even here be urgent need), but there is every reason in the nature of things. If you have desires after a better life, if you are startled on account of your sins, if your soul is filled with some new wonder, lose not a moment. Make haste, make haste, ere you go back to be the old careless man you used to be. Meet Christ.

He honoured him. Zacchæus only went out to get a glimpse of Jesus, and the Lord was not content with that.

He was to know Him, to entertain Him. Christ always does more for us than we imagine.

And He gladdened him. Joy came when Christ was known. Zacchæus did not wait in the tree until he felt glad. He did not come to Christ because he was happy. He came because he was bidden, and, coming, he was made to rejoice. Had he waited in the branches for some rhapsody, he might have stayed there till the ravens ate the flesh off his bones ; and if you tarry till you have some ecstasy, you will probably never see Christ as Saviour at all.

That is how this Guest met this man.

But you say : " Does Christ ever meet with men like that to-day ? " Let me tell you an incident. A few years ago a city accountant, a man in good position and with more than average intelligence, went out with a party to Switzerland. One morning he rose early and walking alone on a Swiss mountain he was suddenly startled by a voice which said, " O thou man of accounts, hast thou settled thine account with me ? " He looked round and saw nobody. There was nobody there whom he could see. Yet the voice was plain enough. " O thou man of accounts, hast thou settled thine account with me ? " It could not be a Switzer, for the words were English, there was certainly no Englishman near, and if there had been he would not have said such words. It was the call of Jesus. How do I know ? That man knelt on the hill-side and yielded himself up to the Lord of life and went back to his hotel a Christian. Is not that a proof ? He has lived a truly Christian life ever since. Is not that a proof ? Why did the change come just then, if it was

not the voice of Jesus? "Oh, but," you say, "you surely do not believe it was an objective voice, it must have been subjective; not a voice without the man, but a voice in his own spirit?" I do not care an atom whether it was objective or subjective. It was the call of Jesus, and facts prove it as real a call, though given in a different way, as the call to Zacchæus on the Jericho road. And it is the call of Christ that you now hear in your heart. Heed it.

III. HOW THIS MAN AND THIS GUEST MET THIS SINNER.

Of course the man and the sinner were the same person, but Zacchæus the man treated Zacchæus the sinner as if he had been another.

The man punished the sinner. Two things stand out in Zacchæus's treatment of himself when he met Christ—Generosity and Justice. Generosity! Picture him with one foot on the doorstep as he turns to the Master of his life and says: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor." We dismiss the ridiculous exposition that makes this to be a description of his previous life; that is nearly unthinkable. It was the declaration of his intention. When Christ saves a man he becomes generous; he is delivered from meanness; freely receiving he freely gives; and if you are still a mean man probably you are not a saved man. Then justice! He would restore fourfold. This was as it should be, but you will see at once that if Zacchæus had turned the two things the other way he would have been a great gainer. If he had made restitution from the bulk of his property and then had given the half of the remainder to

the poor, the poor would have had less and he would have kept more. But in the presence of Jesus we dare not do other than our best. And it is, I believe, our bounden duty when we receive Christ, to go over our past life and put right, as far as possible, the things that are wrong, to apologise where we have offended, to pay where we have defrauded. Of course, I know that to rake up the past would very often do more harm than good; in that case the man must bear his own burden, but where the crooked things can be made straight, Christ demands that they should be straightened.

The Guest pardoned the sinner. Two things stand out here also. Salvation and Sonship. "Salvation is come to this house." Salvation! What had come? Jesus. And Jesus is salvation. Do not make a mistake. Salvation did not come to Zacchæus because he had become so generous and just. He became just and generous because already Jesus was by his side. It is salvation that changes conduct, not changed conduct that brings salvation.

Sonship too. "He also is a son of Abraham." If Zacchæus was a Jew, he had been an outcast, else he could not have been a tax-gatherer. Now he was an outcast no longer. Jesus declared he was a son. What joy!

So it came to pass that the Guest became the Conqueror of the host. Amongst the finest of the Covenanting heroes was John Welch. One night he was tramping over the moss-bogs to preach the next day at a conventicle, when, overtaken by a fog, he was compelled to turn to the nearest shelter, hoping that he

might by God's goodness find it friendly. He was received, and when they sat down to supper, his host made no concealment of his views, he hated the Covenanters, and there was one man whom he would be especially glad to hand over to justice—John Welch. And John Welch sat at his table. Looking across with unblinking eye he said: "I am sent to apprehend rebels, and I know where John Welch is to be found; to-morrow, if you come with me, I will deliver him into your hand." Gladly the offer was accepted, and in the morning they started. When they came in sight of the folk gathered on the hillside, his host became elated, but judge of his surprise when the guest of the night before left his side and took his place at the head of the people! Bewildered he listened as Welch preached the gospel, with the power of God sent down from heaven, preached until the whole assembly was moved, preached until it seemed as if eternal things were the only things that were real, and when the sermon was finished he came up to the preacher and said, "Sir, you told me you were sent to apprehend rebels, and I, a rebellious sinner, have this day been apprehended by the Grace of God."

Was not that fine? And if I, your guest, might this night be privileged to apprehend some of you, who are as my hosts, for Christ, how glad I shall be to preach to you. Better still, if Christ Himself should apprehend you, and then you apprehend that for which you have been apprehended. That would be glorious.

So down yonder on the Jericho plain they grumbled.

"He was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner." They are dead, those grumblers, but their descendants are with us to-day. It needs no laying on of hands to be in this succession. What shall we say to them? We will deal gently with them. It will suffice, perhaps, to say that we wish they would go to Jericho.

"Gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner!" *That was true.* None of the others who thought they were not sinners had invited Him. With a sinner! To whom else should He go? He came to seek and save the sinners, why should He not go home with them? If you say that Zacchæus did not invite Him, it is true; but there was a difference. There are perhaps a thousand houses in this country into any one of which I should feel free to go and say "I have come to have a cup of tea with you"; but there are some houses where I have been, and rather than go there and say it, I would go without tea all my life—and I am very fond of it. You understand, they are not the sort of houses where you could feel free to invite yourself. And so with Christ—He will never invite Himself to the proud and self-sufficient; but when He sees the humble and the contrite, who are too contrite and too lowly ever to think of inviting Him, He invites Himself—"To-day I must abide at thy house."

Gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner! *That was not true.* He did not go as a guest. The sinner needs something other than a guest. He went as a Saviour. He will come to your heart and home and life as a Saviour—is not this what you need? He

went as the Master. You have in your homes the motto—

Christ is the Master of this house,
The unseen Guest at every meal,
The silent Listener to every conversation.

If you mean it, it is well. He went as the Host. Christ is never guest in a human life. He takes control, and this is the way He blesses us. O Martha, Martha! be quiet. You are not the host; Christ is. O Mary, Mary, thou hast chosen the good part that shall never be taken from you.

The narrative implies that the Lord left Zacchæus in the morning. But when He comes to you and me He will never leave us. He will only stay a day at a time, but it will be for ever. To-night He will say to you, "To-day I must abide at thy house"; if you welcome Him, to-morrow morning ere the mist of sleep is from your eyes, He will whisper it again, "To-day I must abide at your house," and you will say, "Yes, Lord, I shall be so glad to have you." The next day, ere any other voice sounds in your ears, He will speak to your heart, saying still, "To-day I must abide at your house," and you will answer, "O Master, if Thou wilt indeed stay with me it will be heaven; go not away." And so on through all the days. When the Lord's-day shall come He will be there again first to greet you, and you will go to the Sanctuary and you will wonder at the grandeur of the singing and the power of the Word. Only one day at a time, but every day He will say to you, "I must abide at thy house."

The last thing. If you had been there that day what would you have said? I think I know. One would have said "Lord, I should have been very glad to have had You, but the fact is, the spare room is occupied." Another: "Lord, I could not think of Your coming to me, until I have time to prepare the house and make it worthy of Thee." Another: "Lord, I hope if ever You come this way again, You will come to me, but not now." Another: "Indeed Thou shalt not. I came out but to see Thee. I have seen Thee. Pass on Thy way, I will not have Thee."

"Oh!" you say, "I would have said none of those things." Then do not say them. You have to-night as real a chance as Zacchæus. Jesus stands by your side. He waits to go home with you. What is your answer? Say, if not in words, at least in effect—

Come, lest this heart should, cold and cast away,
Die, ere the Guest adored she entertain,
Lest eyes that never saw Thine earthly day
Should miss Thy heavenly reign.

Such a prayer will never fail of an answer.

III

OUR CROSS AND CHRIST'S YOKE

“ Let him take up his cross daily.”—LUKE ix. 23.

“ Take My yoke upon you.”—MATT. xi. 29.

JESUS CHRIST is the Gift of God, and the first thing in the Christian life, viewed from our side, is that we should receive what God gives. God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son ; when I believe the love that God hath to me, I take as my Saviour the Gift He has given. Nothing can come before that. No man is a Christian who has not received Christ.

But when we receive Christ there are two things we are to receive from Christ. He desires to give us both of them, and the blessedness and usefulness of our life are largely dependent on whether we take them or not.

I. OUR CROSS.

The first is spoken of in the ninth chapter of the Gospel according to Luke. “ *He said to them all*”—this is a message therefore to every disciple—“ *If any man will come after Me*”—if any man wishes to come

after Me, willeth to come after Me, is determined to come after Me—"let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

We see then that we cannot follow Christ unless we deny ourselves.

A man can no more follow Christ and himself at the same time than he can go up the road and down the road at the same time, the one way is diametrically opposite to the other, both cannot be pursued at once. Having received Christ as my Saviour and Lord, and having the necessity laid upon me of following Him, the initial thing is that I should deny myself. What does that imply? Does self-denial mean only that I shall keep myself ordinarily within bounds, that I should cut off the excrescences of my nature, and renounce some of the pleasures of life? Civilisation would lead me as far as that, Morality would teach me as much, surely Christ would have me go higher! Is it, then, that I am to think humbly of myself? why, a man who is always trying to be humble never forgets himself. The Apostle Paul in the Colossian letter, warns us "Let no man beguile you in a voluntary humility," and sometimes the proudest people in the world are those that are proudly humble. Christ does not want us to think humbly of ourselves, He wants us not to think of ourselves at all. That is what He teaches us here. To deny self is to act toward self as Peter acted towards his Master when he denied Him: he said "I know not the man," and for the moment he lived as if he did not know Him, as if there were no Christ. When you and I learn to deny self, we shall live as if there were no self, we shall never do any-

thing of which self is the centre and aim. Never anything. Self may sometimes be gratified, but when we follow Christ no act will be done simply to please ourselves. Is this a hard lesson? is it difficult to attain to such a standard?

The perfect way is hard to flesh ;
It is not hard to love ;
If thou wert sick for want of God,
How swiftly would'st thou move.

Further, we cannot follow the Christ of Calvary any other way than by the way of the Cross.

The Fathers of the Church were accustomed to say that the way of Christ was not the *via lucis* but the *via crucis* ; not the way of light, but the way of the Cross. We might more truly say that the way of Christ is both *via lucis* and *via crucis*, and it is the way of light because it is the way of the Cross.

Apart from Thee, all gain is loss,
All labour vainly done ;
The solemn shadow of Thy Cross,
Is better than the sun.

When one of those old monks lay dying he said something which may set this forth, and we are glad enough to get a Protestant truth even from the lips of a monk. He asked his brother monks to sweep him the stone floor of his cell. When they had done it he said "Now make on the floor a great cross with the ashes of the fire." Then he demanded to be laid upon the cross of ashes on the stone floor, and in a rapture he said "My own works sink me like lead in the waters, but that which

is now beneath me is buoyant—I rise, I rise!” After an interval he uttered the word “Jesus!” and so he passed over. What he said superstitiously you and I may say without a trace of superstition. This old self of ours is like lead to sink us in the waters, but the cross which Jesus gives us will be beneath us buoyant, and by it we may rise to some purer ether, some diviner air. No man trusting in the Christ of Calvary can follow Him without a cross; His Cross is sufficient to atone for our sins, it needs no cross of ours to accomplish that mystery, but the likeness of Christ is wrought by the Spirit only through the discipline of life. We must carry our cross.

My third remark is that we are none the worse for that.

It is true that every Christian has a cross, but it is not true that Christians are the only people with crosses. Every man has a cross whether he is a Christian or not. As I read the New Testament I do not find that Christ came to a world where there were no crosses in order to give them to those who accepted Him. If you seek to follow Him you will have a cross. Very well: but you have a cross whether you seek to follow Him or not. Everybody has a cross, so a man who becomes a Christian is none the worse in that respect for his faith. The world says to its votaries “Forsake all and follow me, and I will give you nothing, neither in this life, nor in the world to come.” The call of Christ begins in like manner: “Forsake all and follow Me;” in that Christ and the world make equal claims, but He adds, “you shall receive a hundredfold now in this time and in the world to come life everlasting.” So the service of Christ

is much better than the service of the world. If the call had been "Take gun and bayonet and go out into the battlefield ready to die for the glory of war," there would be many to make quick response. It has been computed that there have been one hundred and thirty millions of men slain in fields of battle since the world was : there have not been nearly so many martyrs for Christ : He makes less claim on His followers than the world makes on its followers. Though we follow Christ and have a cross we are not therefore losers by our loyalty to the Master. Again I say Christ did not come to give us crosses, but He came to us who each had his cross to tell us what to do with it.

If we take up our cross we lose it.

That is what Christ taught us. He said, in effect, "Do not wait till, like Simon the Cyrenian, you are compelled to bear the cross ; take it gladly, bear it willingly, and you shall find that it will disappear."

To begin with, what is a cross ? It is, of course, an instrument of execution, something upon which something else is crucified. In our life, then, our cross is some circumstance or appointment which gives us an opportunity of crucifying our old denied self, something that gives us the chance of killing our old ambitions and preferences and pride—that is our cross. I am not now speaking of something in the clouds, but about something that touches each one of us and comes home to us every day. Every one reached by these words has such a something : you have a cross, I have a cross. What are you doing with it ? Seeking to fling it from you ? To escape its weight ? Are you kicking at it,

struggling under it? Then your life is a misery to yourself and to others. The Lord Jesus urges you to cease that, to be willing to have your cross, not to wait until the burden is laid upon you, but to meet it with a smiling face. Take it up willingly, gladly. The circumstances of your life are not there apart from God, He permits them to meet you. Take up your cross and you will find that you will lose it, for there can be no cross if your will is not athwart God's will; of course pain will still be pain, but there will be no cross in the suffering if it be taken as God's appointment.

We have an illustration of this in the early Church. There can be no doubt that slavery is a great curse, yet when slaves in multitudes were led to Christ, Paul wrote to them and said, "Art thou called, being a slave, care not for it." Do not seek to be free, take up your cross, remain a slave for Christ's sake. The effect of that was that by and by labour became so ennobled that wherever Christ was known slavery became impossible. They took up the cross; immediately for them the cross disappeared, and ultimately it disappeared for everybody.

But that is a far-away illustration. Take one nearer at hand. Suppose a man comes to me and sets forth the evil of alcohol, and then says that he will force me to be an abstainer. He proposes to make me one with or without my consent. If a man should talk to me like that I would draw myself up to my full height, six feet one, and answer, "My dear sir you will do no such thing." But now, suppose that I myself look on society, and see the havoc that intoxicating drink is making, and

then for Christ's sake, and for my own sake, and for my brother's sake, I determine to abstain from its use. Is the denial any longer a cross? Had I been compelled to take the position it would have been a cross, but when I willingly take it the cross disappears. The "must" is transmuted into the "will." I am glad to renounce what causes so much ruin and is so insidious in its working. My position in the matter is that every Christian should be an abstainer, and that every abstainer should be a Christian, and that no renunciation is a cross when it is willingly made.

Six times within the compass of three Gospels we are told that we cannot be Christ's disciples unless we take our cross. As far as I know there is nothing else told us so often. We hear a great deal to-day of advance in the divine life: it would be well if we learned this lesson which lies on the threshold of it. It must be of the first importance to be reiterated with such frequency. On four of these occasions there is a slight difference in the emphasis.

In Matthew x. 38 there is the simple statement, "He that taketh not his cross and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me." Our cross is not one that we make, but one that we take. If it be light we need not try to increase its pressure; some people almost seem to think they cannot be holy unless they are unhappy, and that unless they bear a heavy cross they cannot be well-pleasing to God. O soul, thou hast but to take the cross that is appointed. Do not mistake thy cross for thy care; thou art not to cling to thy care, it is to be cast on Him who can bear it, but thou art to cling to thy cross,

and take it up with a glad heart. Thou canst not do this unless thou hast denied thyself, for it takes two hands to lift thy cross, thou hast not a hand to spare to cling to self.

In Mark x. 24 we discover where we get our cross—from the hand of Christ. No Scripture is of private interpretation, and this word, addressed to one man, has a meaning for all. It is the word of the Lord Jesus, “*Come, take up thy cross.*” Who would not take a cross when it is given to us by the hand that was once nailed for our redemption? “Unto you it is given, in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but to suffer for His sake.”

The Revised Version of Luke xiv. 27 gives us another hint—“Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, cannot be My disciple.” *His own cross.* To all of us it would seem so much easier to bear the cross of some other, the cross that seems to us trifling in comparison with our own. I could so easily bear yours, and you think it would be child’s-play if you were called to bear mine. I am not sure our estimate is correct, but even if it is there could be no blessing unless we bear the appointed cross; and if we did not feel the cross we bear the discipline which perfects the disciple would be lacking. Every man is called to bear his own cross. You yours: I mine.

Is that a hard saying? Does it seem impossible for you willingly to accept the circumstance or frustration that seems to cover all your life as with a pall? Listen again to one word in one of our texts. “Let him take up his cross daily.” *Daily.* Ah! that throws a flood

of light upon it. The great cross looms up before me in the early morning and I shrink back from it in terror, saying, "I cannot always bear *that*." Then there comes the voice which assures me, "My child, you are not called to bear it always, only take it for to-day," and with a glad response I say, "Is it only for a day it is given to me? ah, Lord, I can by Thy grace bear it for to-day;" and that day there is no cross. Daily: do not forget the limit in thy cross-bearing, thy cross like thy bread is given to thee but a day at a time.

Do you remember Schiller's legend of the birds? They were made at first without wings, the legend runs. They could sing but they could not soar, and they sang so sweetly that God gave them the gift of wings, but at first the wings were only placed as weights upon them. Since God had put them there the birds bore them patiently, until at length the wings grew into their body, the burdens became pinions, and the birds were able to soar as well as sing. So shall it be with our cross, if we patiently bear it we shall at last find it shall lift us up nearer heaven and nearer God.

Yonder is that great throbbing bulb of silk, which all morning they have been filling with the gas that makes it eager to rise from its place. Twelve men hold it back as it sways in the wind, twelve men strong and alert. Presently a little man steps out and proposes to manage it himself. You say he will never be able to do it—what the twelve do with difficulty he cannot do alone. But he gives the order for the release of the balloon. "Let go!" He is about to adopt a different method of control. They tried to hold it down; he is going to take it up;

and the result is that the balloon which he takes up takes him up. Even so shall it be with thy cross.

The countryman walks the ship that is towed down the river. He has never seen a ship before and he questions, "What are these? and these? and these?" They are the masts and sails and spars and booms. "The ship would be much better without them," he says, and if the ship were always to be in the river he would be right. But the tug-boat casts her off when she reaches the sea, the sails are set, and lo! the sails, which the ship carries, carry the ship. And of this I am certain, that when at last we see the Lord (may we all see Him in peace!) there is nothing for which we shall thank Him, after His grace, more than for the cross, which now we seek so often to escape, poor foolish we!

II. CHRIST'S YOKE.

Here are two paradoxes. The first is that if we take our cross we shall lose it; the second, that if we want to find rest we must begin to do something. Turning now to our second text we read, "Take My yoke upon you . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls." What is the meaning of this expression?

It must mean that Christ is the Master.

It is the master who puts the yoke on the neck of the ox. If I take Christ's yoke I confess He is the Master. Let me remember too that He, who deigned to spend years in the carpenter's shop, knows well how to make a yoke that will fit easily the toiling servant. If we may quote Justin Martyr, a writer of the second century, in his Dialogue with Trypho, he says, concerning Jesus, "He was deemed a carpenter, for He was in the habit

of working as a carpenter when among men, making ploughs *and yokes*." He makes yokes still, and those who take His yoke find that it is easy. Elizabeth Fry, towards the end of her active life, said a wonderful thing: that ever since she knew the Lord, forty-six years before, she never waked one single morning but her first thought was "How can I best serve my Master this day?" The yoke was always on her shoulders. What a blessed life!

To take Christ's yoke means that I become Christ's co-worker.

The yoke is not for one but for two. Still in the East they make them as they made them in Bible times, and I have seen them often, the place for one ox at one end, and another at the other. So when Christ asks me to take His yoke He means the yoke He has taken; He calls me to fellowship with Him in His service. He is at one end of the yoke, I am to be at the other. I am to do what He is doing. Now what is Christ doing? What is He doing to-day? What was He doing when He spake these words? What has He been doing ever since? One thing: and if the answer is as great a blessing to you as it has been to me, I shall be amply repaid for suggesting it. If I can discover what Christ is doing I discover what I am to do, for I am to take His yoke. What then? *He is engaged in saving men and women.* Pause and think of it. That is what He is doing to-day, what He was doing when He uttered this invitation, what He has been doing all along the ages. He calls me to take His yoke: that means I am to devote my life to the self-same purpose. Henceforth

I am not to live for business or for pleasure, these are only the accidents of life ; I am to seek always and everywhere, in company with Christ, to save men and women, to save them by bringing them into the Church and to save them when they are in it. That thought has been to me a greater stimulus than I can tell.

If I take Christ's yoke, I take Christ.

Just as a woman in taking her wedding-ring takes her husband, I take Christ when I take His yoke. Christ becomes more real to me when my life is devoted to His service ; those who have begun to seek the salvation of others will know well what I mean when I say that after that Christ is so much more definite, so much more possessed, as almost to be a different Christ. If you doubt it, take His yoke and put it to the trial.

This is the way to find rest unto the soul.

It will be rest, for you will be free of all entanglements : having now only one purpose you will never have to choose between a multitude. Henceforth you live but to save man in union with Christ. When people come to me and ask whether they may go here or there, whether they may do this or that, play cards, dance, go to the theatre or what not, I always say, "My dear friend, there is something wrong, or it would never occur to you to ask the question. Take Christ's yoke on your shoulders and you may then go anywhere and do anything, for you will then evermore be doing only one thing everywhere, and all these questions will be answered before they are asked."

Again, it will be rest because you will be quite sure of your interest in Christ's salvation when you are yoked

with Him in service. I have the greatest sympathy with Moody when he was asked whether he never doubted or feared, and in his own sharp way answered, "Man, I am too busy; I have no time to doubt or fear." You will generally find that it is the people who do nothing for the souls of others who doubt about their own. How different it was with Clarkson, that great man who accomplished so much to free the slaves, and who, when he was asked after his strenuous toils, "Mr. Clarkson, how is it with your own soul?" looked up, and answered as if surprised, "I had almost forgotten I had a soul." Does this shock you? Are you afraid for him? Let the inscription on his monument which I read in a church near Ipswich, placed there at his own request, reassure you: "TRUSTING CHRIST CRUCIFIED." Believe me, there is nothing higher than to trust Christ Crucified for your own soul, and then to spend all your energy in seeking the souls of others. That is rest.

Yoked with Christ you have rest, for you are never troubled as to where you are to go. Since you are united to Him, one of two things must happen—either He must go your way, or you must go His. You cannot expect Him to move at your choice, so the only alternative is that you must go where He chooses. If He lead you to great success, it is well; if He lead you to apparent failure, it is equally well, since you are yoked with Him. In Samaria where there is great joy in the city, in the desert where there seems to be no service worthy of the name, there is the same rest because of the yoke.

If you were yoked with Christ in that fashion you might have to undertake some hard service, you say. Perhaps you would be called to Africa, or to India, or to China. Perhaps. Probably. But that need not disturb your rest, for still you will be yoked with Christ. You feel that you cannot plough that field. I feel that I cannot do this work, but (and I say it with the utmost reverence), Christ and I can do it, Christ and you can do it, and He graciously allows you and me to be yoked with Him. No place can be too difficult since He and we are together in the work.

But do you say that you are such an ill-worker that you do not know what to do? He knows that and provides for it. He says, "Learn of Me." Look what I do, and do that. The young ox yoked with the old ox, learns to keep step. But will Christ teach such a dull scholar as you—I mean such a dull scholar as I? Yes, for he says, "I am meek and lowly in heart." Ah! Master, it must be so, else long ago Thou had cast me away from Thy service, but now even in my ignorance and failure, I have rest, because of Thy grace.

A friend of mine saw in South Africa a young ox yoked with an old one for the first time. The animal unaccustomed to the task was frisky and refused so work, it pranced and circled and sported for a long space. All the while it was jumping about the old ox looked at it with its great patient eye and when it was tired just started off on the furrow as if nothing had happened. The young worker had at the end to begin just where it would have had to begin at the beginning, and to do the very work it had at first refused. How often have

I know this to be true of Christ's workers who have turned away at first from the service to which He called them: they have gained nothing by delay, but at the end, when their hearts have been humbled, they have just had to do the very thing they shirked at first. Christ is very patient with those who bear His yoke, but He is inexorable in His claim.

Remember, a yoke is not a burden, it is something to make a burden light; it is like the harness of a horse, which helps it to draw with ease a load that, without the harness, would be impossible. If you ever hear anybody say that Christ bears the heavy end of the yoke, remember that the yoke has no heavy end—it is not heavy at all, it is easy, and it makes life's burden easy too. This is rest.

I have heard of a Welsh preacher, I think his name was Rees, who was most popular, and especially popular in a certain village where he was announced to preach on a certain day. He arrived in the village and went to the house where he usually stayed. The time of the meeting arrived, the place was crowded, but the preacher had not come. They began to sing, and the elders of the Church sent a young man to tell Mr. Rees that the people were waiting for him. He returned and said the preacher was coming. Had he seen him? they demanded. No, but he had heard him speak: he had knocked twice without answer, and then he had listened at the door. Mr. Rees was talking to another man, and he had said, "If you do not go, I will not go." The young man was not well instructed in Scripture: what the preacher had said was, "If Thy Presence go not

with me carry me not up hence." The elders knew, and as they stroked their beards they said, "He was talking to another man! well they will both be here presently." While they were speaking Mr. Rees came in and—the other man came in too. There was in the chapel one of those little pulpits that only hold one person, but when Mr. Rees went up the other man went up too. They had a glorious meeting that night; it was not because Mr. Rees was there, but because the Other Man was there,—the Man Christ Jesus. Oh, men and women, the thought is almost overwhelming that as I bear this blessed yoke Christ, the Other Man, will always be near me: though everybody else may leave me I shall be able to say, "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me," and taking my cross daily from His hand and daily wearing His yoke on my shoulder, my life shall be just a little slice of heaven cut out and sent down to earth.

Who then will refuse such a Saviour, or refuse to take such gifts from His pierced hand?

IV

THE UNPRODIGAL SON

“He was angry and would not go in; therefore came his father out and entreated him.”—LUKE xv. 28.

TO many minds this parable of the two sons is the sum of theology: where that idea is entertained it is small wonder that men believe that half the world has never gone away from God, and that the other half which has wandered will inevitably return. It is indeed impossible to exaggerate the claim that the beauty and the pathos of the story have upon our hearts; here wanderers have found waymarks on their journey home, here hope has been born in despair, and men have heard the heart of God calling to them. But the whole gospel is not in this parable, only a phase of it. Think of what is missing. There is here no seeking Saviour, no pleading Spirit, no message of reconciliation; above all, there is no Cross; yet all these are in the gospel.

But while it is possible to make the parable mean too much, is it not also possible, in another view, to make it mean too little? Have we not put less than the due

emphasis on the story of the elder brother, whom I venture to call the Unprodigal Son? We have been tempted to think that his story is a sort of postscriptum, that his introduction rather mars the exquisite narrative, at the most that he forms a convenient background. Suppose, instead, that Christ intended him to be put in the foreground, that the lesson the Master meant to teach gathers chiefly round his head, that when the words were spoken it was from him that the Pharisees had the most to learn, and that our own case too is there revealed as in a mirror, may it not be that new light is yet to break forth from the old story?

Whom does he represent? The Jews as opposed to the Gentiles? The Pharisees as contrasted with the Publicans? Self-righteous sinners in distinction from outrageous sinners? The truest answer was given by Krummacher when he discovered that in his own heart there lurked a traitorous spirit that caused him to misunderstand his Father and to be jealous of his brother, "Ah," he said, "it is I myself." That is terribly true. Wholly this unprodigal son represents many Christian people, in part he represents us all. Let us scan his story and see if it is not our own.

I. THE DISCORD OF A SON'S LIFE.

This burst of anger was but the sample and climax of the whole life.

Had there been complete agreement between him and his father up till that day there had never occurred this outburst of passion. He and his father lived in the same house the weary years, but they had not lived together; they were apart in all their interests. This son was

exact, punctilious, painstaking, but he was severe and unfilial. He was like those who are in the Father's service, but not in His society, who are more familiar with the field than with the feast, to whom the work to which they are devoted is nothing but drudgery. They are God's children, they are at home, but they are not their Father's familiars or confidants.

His action was determined by his will.

It was no misunderstanding of the moment, not a sudden gust of passion. "He *would not* go in." Is it not almost an echo of the Master's word, "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life?" He did not seek to bridge the gulf, he was resolute in keeping without; it was he who had built up the icy barriers between himself and his father, and he would do nothing to remove them. We often wonder at the severance death makes between friends:—

We marvel that the silence can divide
The living from the dead; yet more apart
Are they who all life long dwell side by side
But never heart by heart.

His conduct was based on his notion of righteousness.

He was so much better than his brother, he had squandered no portion in the far country, he had not left his father mourning! Yet he had never got so much as a kid of the flocks from his father, while his scapegrace brother at the very moment of his return had got the fatted calf. Was it right to reward the great sinner so quickly? To reward him at all? Of what benefit was it to serve the father if those who serve him least get the most. Oh! how many of the saints argue thus when

they find others exulting in joy to which they are strangers, when they who have always lived respectable and religious lives seem to be denied the gladness that comes so spontaneously to those who deserve nothing. Little wonder they frown down the raptures and enthusiasms of young converts. They forget, as this unprodigal son forgot, that a home is not kept on the strict principle of awards, so much for so much, that often the most unworthy gets, and naturally gets, the most lavish love, that the delicate child who does nothing is more tenderly cared for than the strong and robust. Even a man's morality may discount his joy. A hard honest man is a man who is hardly honest, and this son was barely righteous though he had never transgressed the father's commandment—barely righteous, certainly not good.

His churlishness was upheld by his earnest service.

Coldness of heart is never so awful as when it is joined to perennial activity. Work becomes the end of life, whereas it should never be more than a means to an end. We see that brother of ours, free, frank, unthinking, he sups and is merry, but we feel forced to press on with our ceaseless tasks. Alas! alas! for us when we begin to think our early ardours, if we had them, a mistake, or the absence of them now a denial of our rights; when we are irritated that others who serve less should enjoy more of the father's smile than ourselves. Why should he, that good-for-nothing, be made so glad, when I, though these many years I have served thee, though I serve thee still, am left outside in the cold?

So his life was roofed in with anger.

There were no stars in the sky that night, everything was blackened by his unreasoning wrath, and, like Jonah, he would have said that he did well to be angry. He flung defiance to his father until the very servants were astonished; he was at war with everybody because he was not at peace with himself. Have you never met a man like this? has there not sometimes been such a one in your own house? Be not angry with him—Pity him! Pity him! The Father pities him, He comes out and entreats him.

II. THE PATHOS OF A FATHER'S LOVE.

The son's waywardness was the cause of this extra grace.

We would never have known God's heart but for our guilt. Love is never fully manifest till it is tried. I can understand what Bunyan meant when he cried, "O blessed sins!" not that sin can ever be other than blameworthy, and the sin of the saints most blameworthy of all, but by the sins we have learnt to know God. This is the way of grace.

The outburst of anger was the occasion of the grace.

When the son was at his worst the best of the father's heart was seen. "Therefore came his father out." So has it ever been with our Lord.

The very spear that pierced His side,
Drew forth the blood to save.

The father's heart was the spring of the grace.

He came out because he was his father. What generosity is here! The son had done enough to freeze his father into silence, but the father took the first step. He did not stand on his dignity as he might have done.

He did not need to do it, he had so much. People who have two square feet of dignity are generally anxious to make sure of standing on it, those who have two square miles are not so particular. The father was all dignity as he stood before his wayward son that night. "He came out and entreated him." It would have been little use to send a servant; the father himself came out. May the Great Father come out to some of His children now—the servant's words are too poor to win the heart.

The brother's return was the opportunity of grace.

Father and son had never agreed about the absent one, but now that he had come back, the joy in the father's heart overflowed; if the appeal had been made before it would only have made the estrangement greater, but surely now it would prevail. Though the elder son grudged his brother's welcome, the father could not be happy without him: he must have both his sons at the feast. When prodigals come home the saints are often blessed too; we long for the coming home of the wanderers that the unprodigal sons may come nearer the Father's heart.

The entreaty was the result of the love.

Was there not expectation in the father's heart as he came out? There was almost desperation. The nearest Scripture that interprets it is this: "As though God did beseech you." O saints of the Most High, sons at home but distant from your Father, children of God who hold scant communion with your Lord, come in. For the Father's sake come in, for the sake of those who are returning, for your own sake, for the sake of the servants, come in. "His father came out and entreated him."

III. THE SECRET OF THE DISSONANCE.

Why did the elder brother so completely fail?

He did not realise one simple fact.

The whole secret lies in one word at the beginning of the story, the word "them." "The father divided unto *them* his living." When the younger son made request, the father gave each his portion; he enriched both. So much was for the elder, so much for the younger. I believe that the same thing sometimes happens in India to-day, a father allots his property and the sons enter upon their inheritance before his death, maintaining him in his position, but already possessing his riches. With all his faults—his irreverence and his independence—the younger son excelled the elder in this, he believed the father meant what he said. The elder believed the portion would be his some day, when his father died, but he does not seem to have taken seriously the deed of gift, and though he was rich he lived like a day labourer. Like those who never apprehend that now they are made partakers of Christ's inheritance, who only hope that perhaps it will be theirs when they die, and who in the thought of the future heaven miss the heaven on earth that they might now enjoy.

He expected the gifts in detail.

But having given all at once you will see that the father could never give them again. "Thou never gavest me a kid," the son exclaimed. Why, he had given all the flocks to him at the beginning! He could not afterwards have renewed the gift, that would have been to have cast doubt on the first giving, and to have made all the giving unreal and insecure. He could

not have given things in detail having already given them in the gross, that would have been to reserve all that was not again bestowed. No, all was given at first; instead of expecting his father to make him little presents now and then, the son should have understood that all was his, that he had not even to ask for anything he wanted, only to go and take it. He might have had a kid of the flocks every day if he had liked, they were all his. Do you see the mistake he had been making all along the years?

Ah! I know it. Years ago I heard people speaking of joys and attainments to which I was a stranger, and I got down on my knees and pleaded with God that He would give me these blessings, pleaded and seemed to plead in vain, until one day I rose with holy laughter and said, "What a fool you are! you are asking God to give you things He has given you already. All spiritual blessings are yours in Christ. God cannot give you these things; you have but to take and to enjoy them."

An earnest teacher who wanted to enforce the lesson of God's willingness to bless, once asked a Lancashire lad, "If you were hungry and asked your father for bread, he would give it to you, wouldn't he?" "No," he replied, "he wouldn't." "Not give you bread!" came the astonished rejoinder. "No," he answered. "He would say 'Tak t' knife an' help yoursel'.'" That is it. We do not need to wait till our Father give us the spiritual gifts—they are ours for the claiming and the taking. Help yourself. But this unprodigal son did not understand that.

He bowed to his father's misunderstood will.

He was sternly dutiful, he misread his father, but he would honour him ; if his father wished to treat him so differently to his brother, well, let it be so. He grew silent and drifted apart, the sense of wrong was a constant irk. He determed to be heroic and go through life bravely bearing its burdens. He was morbidly conscientious. But God does not want our heroics, He wants our simple love. See where he had got to ! He was more familiar with the servants than with his father, he only knew of his father through the servants, he did not feel at liberty to rush in and share in the general joy. What a picture of many of us who are thoroughly versed in the externals of worship and know so little of the essentials, who know the servants well, who can talk about the minister, or to him, especially if there is a spice of gossip in the subject, but if the conversation turns to truly spiritual things we so often become strangely silent.

He did not count his father his friend.

"That I might make merry with my friends," he said, and implied in the saying of it, "You, my father, are not one of them, I cannot be merry with you." It is very sad in family life when father and son are not real friends. Sometimes the fault is with the father : it is a great mistake when children are growing up to be ever insisting on parental authority—try to be your son's companion rather than his father. You will influence him more that way. Sometimes the fault is with the son, as it was here. This son formed his own circle and shut his father out. How dreadful it is when

we shut our God out of the list of our friendships! When we cannot be merry in His company! "It is the heart that is not yet sure of God, that is afraid to laugh in His presence."

He wronged his brother.

He imagined and said the worst of him, so easy is it for us in our self-righteous pride to thrust others even deeper than they have fallen. Perhaps he envied him: of course he would never have done as his brother had done, his blood ran too cold for that; but in his secret heart he imagined that his brother had the best of it. Do we not ourselves sometimes almost think that worldly people are happier than we are, that they get more out of life than we do, and if it were not for our future life it would seem a vain thing to serve God? Praise be to His name, the future hope is secure, but our Father wants us also here to be happier than it is ever possible for a mere man of the world to be. Do not exclude yourself from the Father's joy, do not be jealous of those who seem to live so triumphantly, you too may share their experience. The Father comes out and entreats you to enter into it.

IV. THE NEW KEYNOTE.

There is no end to this story: we are not told what happened. I suppose we are left each one to fill it up for ourselves. But can you think that the Father's pleas were unavailing, that he went back heart-broken in the hour of his joy? I think the unprodigal son was won too that festal day, that he saw the terrible mistake he had been making, that he fell on his father's neck, knelt at his father's feet, sobbed out his confession of

failure, that he was clasped to his father's heart, and hand in hand they went back to his brother. There is a hymn, two lines of which strangely move me—I seldom sing them without tears, they are so sadly true of my own experience—

I loved the garish day, and spite of fears ;
Pride ruled my will : remember not past years !

Remember not past years ! That is in effect what this son said as he stepped into the new life. See how it came about :—

He was re-assured of the forgotten fact.

The father did not again give him everything, he only assured him that all was his. “All that I have is thine, it has been thine all the years ; I have wondered at your strange perversity, my boy—wondered whether you would ever discover your mistake. How could you so have misunderstood me ? I never gave you a kid ! And was that the thought that severed us ? Ah ! the pity of it ! Had I only known ! Why, all is thine !” In the spiritual life this is the fact of facts. All is ours in Christ, there is no grace, no power, no patience, no joy, no victory, but it is ours. We must recognise this before we can realise it, but if we are Christ's people, if we are sons at home, it is true whether we recognise it or not.

He discovered that there was something dearer than “things.”

“Thou art with me. Surely I am better than a lamb from the flock ; thou hast me. Dost thou not love thy father ? Thou art *ever* with me. In this thou art better

than thy brother who left me, and almost brought down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. Thou didst not go away, and if in the past thou didst not quite understand, there is yet a future. Thou shalt be with me still, and we shall be really one. Thou shalt have the portion, and thou shalt have me too. Is not that enough?" Ah! the Father Himself is best of all, and to be with Him is to have everything. At last—

When all the shadows flee,
Fairer than morning, lovelier than the daylight,
Dawns the sweet consciousness, I am with Thee.

He found that there was something higher than righteousness.

Can that be? Yes! there comes a time when no rules will hold, when the higher law of the heart becomes regnant. "It was meet we should make merry." Meetness is better than righteousness; better than to be full is to be overflowing; better than dutiful it is to be glad. That is what your Father wants. "O my son," you can fancy the father of the story saying, "I looked in vain into your eyes these years for one flash of love, and it came not, my heart was hungry, but thy brother has given me what I ached to have, and never had from thee." Love is better than righteousness, for it includes it. Merely negative goodness is half evil, but when a man can truly say, "I love," he will soon be able to add "Neither transgressed I thy commandment."

He understood at length that there was something better than service.

What can be better? Fellowship! Sympathy! Life! It is good to serve for many years, but it is better to sit at the Master's feet and learn of Him. Again, the father might have said, "My son, your brother came home determined to ask me to make him as one of the hired servants, but O my son you have made yourself like a hired servant all these weary years. There is a better life for you. I do not overlook your faithful deeds, but I want you to come in and to be your father's friend and companion." That is God's call. In this age there is abundance of work and effort, He calls us to communion and worship; no amount of service will compensate for the lack of the Father's smile.

He entered upon his inheritance.

One truth, one little truth accepted and realised made the change. That was all. Now, beloved child of God, have you yet understood and believed that in Christ all spiritual blessings are yours, that they are actually and truly yours, that there is no grace for life or for death that is not yours? Your Father has divided unto you your portion. Are you living on it, or are you yet doubting His gift? Enter on your inheritance. You are a son: be no more a servant, drudge no longer, live with your Father, remember He values your loving presence at the hearth more than your service in the field. Remember you have a brother, do not shut your heart to him; he may not have served so well as you, but perhaps he has already rejoiced more in the Lord: do not be envious of him nor seek to drag him down to the level of your life, let the Father lift you up to his gladness. Has he squandered his portion? Share yours

with him, you have enough for him and for yourself. What was not enough for one will make a royal feast for two. O unprodigal son go thou to the prodigal and say, "Brother, I have never left home in the way you did, but I have caused my father as much trouble as you have; your return has brought me back; there is enough for us all; let us live together in love." Then together turn to the Father saying, "Father, here we are, Thy prodigal and Thine unprodigal son; Thy son who squandered and Thy son who spared: let us begin afresh, all thou hast is Thine and all is ours. Thou art ours and we are Thine." That is what happened that day. And again the father would embrace them and again they would embrace each other. So the feast issued in a great reconciliation, and the merriment deepened into a lasting peace.

O prodigal! Come home.

O brother of the prodigal! Come to thy Father's heart.

V

CHRIST TEMPTED OF THE DEVIL

“Being forty days tempted of the devil.”—LUKE iv. 2.

CHRIST was in all points tempted like as we are. This is an express Scripture statement, but if we think of Him as incapable of feeling as we feel, and as having no need to fight as we fight, we shall not be able to believe it. Yet it is true, for Christ is our Saviour. He is God else He could not be Saviour, but He is also our Saviour being truly Man. He was tempted as we are. Think therefore how you are tempted, and say, “Christ was tempted like that.” You see no devil, yet the devil tempts you; the evil is often overlaid with good, yet it is a temptation: sometimes indeed it appears to be actual good, the devil appears as an angel of light. Christ was tempted as we are.

It is also true that we are tempted as Christ was. Not only may we throw the light of our own temptation on Christ's; we may learn in His temptation something about our own.

How was Christ tempted and when? The “how” depends on the “when.” It was at the threshold of His

public ministry. We may believe that as our Lord went forward in the appointed way, He had increasingly clear vision of the work He had to do. All along the years at Nazareth no doubt He was tempted in His personal life as we are ; but now, anointed for His life-work, full of the Spirit, and led of the Spirit into the wilderness, is there not a special purpose in the temptation of the Adversary? Has it not chiefly reference to His work as Messiah? He is about to inaugurate His kingdom. How shall He do it?

Doubtless there are in the temptation of Christ lines comprehensive enough to include all varieties of temptation. Already in this place I have preached twice on the subject in that view, but the full significance of these events only dawns upon us when we look at them in the light of Christ's mission. Though Christ knew the end of His mission I am not sure that He knew all the steps of the way. Indeed, He Himself tells us that at each step He waited to hear the Father's voice, and to do the Father's will. While He waited to know the Father's will there came a voice soft, dulcet, insinuating. Was this the voice of the Father? No, it was the Tempter who proposed plan after plan other than the plan of the Father. All of them had something to recommend them, but all were temptations of the devil.

These same three temptations assail us to-day, to-day they assail us vehemently, as we attempt to further the kingdom of God. Christ triumphed, but we can estimate the subtlety of the issue presented to Him, when we remember how many who have begun to follow Christ have succumbed.

There was the Social Way, the Mechanical Way, the Fanatical Way. The Lord put them all from Him and chose the Spiritual Way. His aim was to reach the whole man, each individual man in his entirety, and it could not be accomplished by any of these rejected expedients.

I. THE SOCIAL WAY.

The point of attack lay in Christ's hunger.

The temptation was not only to turn stones into bread for His own satisfaction, but to read in His own case the need of the world He came to save. Its hardest task was to feed itself, its greatest want the satisfaction of its bodily appetites. How clamant that need His own hunger after forty days' fasting would show, and, while His sympathy with the hungry was keenest, the suggestion was made to Him. "The world can easiest be reached here, here it can be most easily won. Make the stones bread."

Was this the voice of the Father? It almost seemed as if it were. "Think over it. The people cannot attend to the next world till they are free of the care of this: they cannot take thought for their souls till provision is made for their bodies. You have power to work the transformation, to make the stones bread. You know this. You will prove yourself to be the Son of God, and win the people most quickly in this way."

The plan indeed was that Christ was to be like those Roman kings who won the multitude by providing "bread and circuses." The unthinking man will always follow the leader who makes bread cheap. But is it the unthinking man Christ wants?

Christ resisted this temptation and so must we.

His answer was a sword from God's armoury: by that same sword we can conquer. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God."

"Not by bread alone!" Bread is not even man's chief need. It is the one he feels the most, but the unfelt need is the greatest need. Death is more direful than pain.

"Not by bread alone!" Thus it is written, not only in the Word of God, but in the heart of man. It was God who wrote it in both.

"Not by bread alone!" If the appeal comes to the lowest part of man's nature, it will probably end there.

"Not by bread alone!" The man will be no better, and no nearer God when he is fed than he was before. A fat sinner can be as great a sinner as a hungry sinner.

"Not by bread alone!" You who toil for the bread that perisheth, who live only for this world and its satisfactions, remember these are more necessary things. Do not mistake potatoes for piety.

"Not by bread alone!" When the demand is made that we cease preaching the gospel of the grace of God to people, until we have secured them better social conditions, let us remember this. The demand is of the devil.

"Not by bread alone!" Have you bread enough? Do not forget that there are higher things. Say not to your soul, "Soul! eat, drink, and be merry," else God will surely say to you in that very hour, "this night thy soul shall be required of thee." You will die to God when you are content with bread.

Yet Christ gave the people bread.

He went straight from Quarantania to Cana of Galilee, and His first miracle was the supply of wine for the feast. He would not receive the suggestion from the devil that He should satisfy the needs of the body, yet straightway He goes and does it. There is a striking correspondence, of which this is the first, between the three events recorded by John as lying at the beginning of Christ's ministry and the three temptations of the desert.

Christ would not rest His mission on the supply of bodily needs, yet in beginning His mission He supplies that need. Wherein lay the difference? It is important to discover it, for if we are to resist the temptation, we are also to follow the example. The whole point is that He did not rest His Messiahship on the miracle: it was spontaneous, not official. The ruler of the feast did not know whence the wine came. Christ did not say, "I am the Son of God, and therefore I will make this water into wine, come and see and wonder." He did not say, "I made the water into wine, therefore receive Me as the Messiah." His only object in making it was to keep the feast going, to supply a human need, it was His sympathy as man, not His dignity as God that was displayed.

In like manner the Church must help men in their need, but it does not ground its claim on its charity. If a man joins the Church for the bread he can get, he shuts the door of his being to any other blessing. Christians will help the needy not because they are Christians, but because being Christians they are more human. It is good to feed the hungry, but farmers

and corn merchants can do that. Christ's aim is higher.

I remember during a Mission in a certain place, when there was a widespread strike and much consequent misery, our morning prayer-meeting was attended by some of the men out of work. An enthusiastic helper, one of the best men I ever knew, noticing the ravenous look of the men, one morning announced that the next day he would give every man out of work a bun and coffee. The next day hundreds of men trooped in and we had a larger meeting than ever we had expected, but—it was not a prayer-meeting. Prayer ceased and the place became a Relieving Office, a Casual Ward, nor could all our after efforts restore the prayer-meeting. So we continued the daily buns and coffee.

Free breakfasts, and Robin dinners, and cabmen's suppers are all good for what they are. Christian people may well look after these things, but they are no better Christians because they do them, nor is the world a whit nearer Christ.

II. THE MECHANICAL WAY.

The point of attack lay in Christ's Kingship.

There could be no hope for the world until Christ was King over it: it was His right to reign: the kingdoms of the earth were His. But Satan was in possession, and there could be little hope of conquest while he barred the way. How adroit then was the suggestion, "If Thou wilt worship me, all shall be Thine: I will retire into the background, and men shall be as obedient to Thee as they have been to me."

Christ could come to the kingdom by two methods.

He could so win men's hearts that they would enthrone Him and live to His praise, obedient to His word. Or He could take the throne, begin with the nation and not with the individual, claim an external homage, and hope that by degrees man would learn to serve Him for love. To adopt the second way was the temptation of the devil.

Yet He could have accomplished it easily. "Thinkest thou," He said afterwards to Peter, "that I cannot now pray to My Father and He shall presently give Me twelve legions of angels." He could have answered the Jew's expectations, and have led the nation against the Romans. As Cæsar's vassal He might have been permitted to reign over the Jews. Alas! that would have been to bow the knee to Satan. But He could not have been satisfied with the throne of Palestine; He claims the world. He might then have become Cæsar Himself and reigned as a temporal king over man. But such a sovereignty would have had the limitations of all earthly kingships. It is impossible to legislate in advance of the sentiment of a people: it would have been impossible even for Christ had He only been an earthly king, and so far as the people bowed to Satan, so must He have bowed. The thought is awful, but it is implied in the temptation. If Christ had yielded, if He had worshipped the devil, the world would have bowed to Him, and it might have been labelled "Christian." But would it been a Christian world?

Christ resisted this temptation, and so must we.

From the old armoury He brought forth another weapon of defence. "Thou shalt worship the Lord

thy God and Him only shalt thou serve." God, and Christ as the Son of God, demands the whole life. When a British sailor raised the British flag in Australia the fact was reported in the House of Commons. There was one flag on the whole continent, and the question was asked of the Government, "How much do you claim?" The answer was characteristic of our nation, "We claim the whole of it, gentlemen." God claims the whole, and the two words "Him only" might be written across every life devoted to the Son of God.

"Him only!" The Bread is not alone, but God must be alone, and all others in Him. We are loyal to our earthly sovereign, because we recognise that queen or king is appointed by God and His Christ, and as we are loyal to God, we are loyal to His appointment. The domain of our earthly monarch is limited, and his power is delegated.

"Him only!" Then Christian service must be a service of the heart. A mere enrolment is insufficient, a verbal assent is not enough. To call myself a Christian and continue to serve the devil is a mockery of Christ.

"Him only!" Christianity forced by the civil power is not what Christ seeks. Spain made South America Christian after this pattern, but who does not blush for South American Christianity to-day? In San Salvador the Portuguese, three hundred years ago, claimed to have made thousands of Christians; they made them by the simple method of taking a whitewash brush and sprinkling all the people they came across: it is needless to say that such Christianity had sunk back again to heathenism long before the modern missionary epoch.

Russia to-day is attempting the same thing : she makes all her citizens Christians by force of law, claiming an outward homage irrespective of the heart. Christ deliberately refused that way.

Yet Christ claimed a kingdom.

But He does not accept mouth homage, His is the empire of the heart. He will not acknowledge those who simply patronise Him. Nicodemus came with such intention ; if Christ had lowered His claim he would have been willing to have received Him. But the Lord answered to the man, who, in talking of the kingdom, never doubted that he at least would be inside it, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." Not by an outward baptism but by an inward birth men become My subjects, He said, and when they are Mine they are like the wind, their life is free and spontaneous—mysterious indeed, but never mechanical.

III. THE FANATICAL WAY.

The point of the third attack lay in the expectation of the Jews.

They hoped that at one of their feasts, in some supernatural way the Messiah would suddenly appear, and awe the people into obedience. The devil said, "Fall in with the popular notion, awake the wonder of the people, come with spectacular effect. Go up to the pinnacle of the temple where there is so sheer a descent into the valley that men get dizzy looking down, and fling yourself off. Peril your fate on the issue. Risk all on one sign. You know God will hold you up, He has promised to do it, and you will at a stroke be en-

throned in the hearts of the people. You were right in rejecting the other ways, the Bread way is wrong: the Imperial way is wrong, but this is the short road to your goal. You have refused to appear to the people as a philanthropist, you have refused to make your advent as a king; come, then, as a magician."

Christ resisted this temptation, and so must we.

The fantastic way was not worthy of the Messiah. The morbid wonder of the people would not have led to spiritual allegiance, they would only have asked for other and greater spectacles. The Master refused to pander to their desires. He said to them afterwards, "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe," nor did He attempt to wrest faith on such terms. Indeed, it would have been impossible. When Pilate sent Him to Herod, a man who was ever seeking new sensations, the Master answered him nothing, nothing at all; it is one of the most wonderful scenes in Christ's life, He was no travelling juggler ready to give a performance at pleasure. Nay, rather, He indignantly spurned the suggestions of the Evil One. "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God," was the word that gave the victory. If we ever seek in that way to tempt God we are ourselves yielding to temptation.

In the Soldier's Pocket Book the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army declares that soldiers, like missionaries, must be fanatics. That is probably the ideal for a soldier, but as to missionaries I beg the Commander-in-Chief's pardon when I deny his statement. A fanatic is a man who has exaggerated and excited notions, and that is just what a missionary must not be.

Nor must any intelligent Christian be a fanatic. Christ turned His back on that way and we must follow. If we attempt to work miracles and put them forth as the sign of our doctrine, the Egyptians will do likewise with their enchantments. Not all the wonders we can accumulate will do as much to bring men to God as the sweet, gentle influence of a good life lived in the faith of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead"; indeed, One has risen from the dead and yet men do not believe.

Years ago a leading scientist proposed that the efficacy of prayer should be tested in a scientific manner. His plan was to take a hospital ward, to pray for the cases on one side, not to pray for those on the other, and to abide by the result. The Christian Church, happily, did not accept the offer. If they had done so it would have settled nothing. Had the cases prayed for got well first our opponents would have said it was an accident; had they been last it would not have altered in the least our faith in Christ and in prayer. The test was fallacious.

Let us cease putting emphasis on haphazard occurrences, cease our craving for the marvellous and exceptional, as if these were supreme arguments for the gospel of salvation from sins. If a man come declaring that he has had toothache and that when he prayed it got better, he can be matched by another man who had toothache, who did not pray, and yet got better. The first man knows he has had an answer to his petition, but it proves nothing to anybody else.

No man has given this generation a more forcible example of the power of the supernatural than that saint of God, George Müller, but even he has probably done more to turn men to Christ by his testimony to the grace of God than by his Orphan Homes. When you hear that the homes were maintained by prayer you wonder, but do you straightway go and establish an orphan home of your own? If you know the power of prayer your faith is strengthened, but if you are an unbeliever you probably say you do not understand it, and pass on. I notice that the Chinese Ambassador the other day, after inspecting the homes, declared that he was converted from materialism to faith, but does any one suppose that such faith is what Christ seeks on earth? He deliberately rejected the fanatical way; the emphasis of His work is on the fact that He is Jesus, who saves His people from their sins, and one holy life is a profounder argument for Christ than all the physical marvels that could be recounted, even were all of them true.

Yet Christ did many miracles.

He would not lay claim to be the Son of God by casting Himself from the temple tower, but when He next visited the temple He made a whip of small cords and drove out the money changers and sellers of doves. Was this a sign? If you will read again the narrative you will find that He did it, not to prove that He was the Messiah, but simply to restore the worship of the temple to something of its former reverence for God. He worked miracles of healing, but there is appended to many of them a clause that has perplexed us, "See thou

tell no man." He healed men simply that they might be free from disease, not that He might be proclaimed the Christ of God. He was not anxious to be accepted because He cured the bodies of men: He desired to heal their souls. The devil told Him to cast Himself down from the temple: He did a greater wonder than that, He ascended on high; anybody could jump down, He went up; but He was careful not to depart in sight of the crowd; He led a few of His disciples to a lonely spot near to Bethany, and from thence He rose and disappeared. To the disciples whose hearts were already His own the vision was granted; the unbelievers saw it not, and if they had seen it they would not have been helped at all to the spiritual way.

This is the way Christ chose. The goal of all the other ways is right, but the path ends before it reaches the goal. The spiritual way is the way of waiting, but it is the only ladder which, resting on earth, reaches heaven.

In all temptations let us fly to Christ who is able to succour us when we are tempted, but chiefly let us learn to-day that in the service of the kingdom we must go His way. Short cuts, however enticing, are of the devil. Be patient and believe that His Spirit will make the spiritual forces effective. Do not substitute earthly good for heavenly joy, do not lower the standard in order to gain the multitude, do not rest content in a mere external and mechanical assent, do not rely at all on the abnormal and exceptional. The claim of Christ is on the whole man; He makes that claim in order to

save men from sin and lead them to God ; He is able to save to the uttermost them that come to Him : let us see to it that we ourselves are wholly yielded to Him, then, choosing His way, we shall, though permitted to suffer awhile, at last surely share in His triumph.

VI

NEVER DESPAIRING

“Never despairing.”—LUKE vi. 35 (R.V.).

THE verse from which the text is taken reads in the Authorised Version, “Love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, *hoping for nothing again*, and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest.” One of the most noticeable changes in the Revision is in the central clause: “hoping for nothing again” becomes “never despairing.” It was evidently the wording of the previous verse that led to the old translation, but the new is indisputable. The difference between the two is perhaps not so great as may at first appear. If we hope for nothing in return when we lend we never despair, if we do good naturally we never despair, if we catch the Spirit of Jesus and bear the likeness of the Father we never despair. May our lives as well as the text be “revised” into this form!

Whether these words form part of the Sermon on the Mount or of another Sermon on the Plain is little

matter. This is the sermon from the Bible, nay, from the lips of Christ. Did He speak these words only once? He speaks them now. He speaks them often. Did He repeat the sermon? He does it always. Did He vary the words? To each man the message comes with a new adjustment. But to all it is the Message of the Mountain for life on the plain.

The Sermon on the Mount is not the beginning, it is the culmination of the gospel. Because of that it is first seen, but it is not therefore the foundation: it is like the spire of the village church, the last built, but as we near the village the first visible. Underneath all precepts of duty there lies the rock of the gospel. Atonement is before service, and grace before works. But while we remember that, let us not forget that works inevitably follow the belief of doctrine.

Count Tolstoi believes that the keynote of the Sermon on the Mount is in the words, "Resist not evil." I suggest the text instead. Since Christ has shed His blood for human sin, we may well inscribe on all our banners the legend, "*Nil desperandum.*"

I. A GOOD MAN IS LIABLE TO DESPAIR.

He may despair because goodness is so good.

When I speak of a good man I mean a Christian man, no higher name could be given to him. Of course the term is only relative, for in a very real sense the best of men are not good. Yet in another sense, which if not absolute is just as real, grace does make men good; Barnabas was a "good man," and we may all be like him. One of the most touching requests for prayer that I ever had sent to me was one from a little child ;

upon it the words, "I want to be good;" there is everything in that; all God desires, all Christ works.

He died to make us good ;
That we might go at last to heaven,
Saved by His precious blood.

A good man is a man who does good, who goes about doing it : a man who does good to the unthankful and to the evil, does good not because they are good to whom he does it, or because they will be good or do good in return, but simply because good is good. Ordinary men do good as a refined species of selfishness; they make exchange, good for good, love for love, gift for gift, but a truly Christian man—that is, a man truly like Christ—will act like General Gordon, who determined that if he came home from Khartoum he would do good to people as he would do good to tables and chairs, never expecting to be thanked, but satisfied that he had done it. That is the true spirit, but its very purity may lead the good man to despair when he finds that he comes so short of his ideal, and so often in doing good he has eye on the reward rather than on the deed.

He may despair because evil is so evil.

There is an easy optimism that refuses to see shadows, that shuts its eyes to evil, and declares good to be everywhere. The man with the Word of God cannot do that, he cannot do it if he reads aright the facts of nature, least of all if he really tries to help people to the life eternal.

The problem before us is so vast, so intricate, and apparently so insoluble.

The struggle is so oft renewed, the good pass away, the new generations revive the old evils, and ancient errors that we thought dead come strangely to life again; our task is as the task of Sisyphus rolling a stone up a mountain to have it ever roll back again.

Progress is so slow, we win men only one at a time, and they perish in multitudes.

The time is so long. It is nineteen hundred years since Christ came and there is not yet a village wholly Christ's.

Sin is so mighty : even the good man feels that ; what must it be with the bad man, the man who knows no pardon, and has never felt the triumph of the Holy Spirit? Iniquities abound ; we are tempted to ask ourselves whether it is worth while to fight.

Temptations are so ensnaring and so numerous, they change their guise but are ever seductive.

The human heart is so fickle : those whom we fain hoped were won go back to the world they had renounced.

Men are so unthankful : our best efforts are unappreciated and gratitude is so rare.

Those who seek to save men are so unworthy. How can we help others when we realise that we ourselves are in thrall?

Failure is so oft repeated, disappointment is so common an experience. We hoped for much and had little. Every new device promises to bring the millennium, and if we look only at the things that are seen

that is as far off as ever. New men and new methods come with flourishing trumpets, they pass, and the desert is a desert still.

What wonder if even the best man despair?

Despair is round about him.

It has many manifestations; both the life and the literature of to-day are full of it. Man is looked upon as a grim mistake, and the world as but a theatre of tragedy.

There is a despondency which gravely counsels us to let the race die out: marriage is to be abolished and this generation to be the last. That is despair frank spoken.

There is a flippancy born of the same mother. A smartness that makes light of everything, reckless because it thinks nothing is any good. The most sacred themes are but the subject of joke, the Bible a jest-book. To-morrow will be as to-day, let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.

There is an apathy which declares the teaching of Christ to be impossible, and deliberately lowers it to the level of present experience. The high demands of the Master are counted as the dreams of a visionary, an impolitic ideal.

There is a feverishness that makes a convulsive effort at salvation, like the last grasp of a drowning man. Instead of seeking to change the man, it seeks only to change his conditions, instead of taking account of all his life, it fixes only on that which is earthly. "Never mind about heaven," it says, "let us make heaven here, instead of trying to save individuals let us raise the

community." These short and wholesale methods are a sign of despair, nothing else ; and they are as futile as they are desperate.

But in spite of all, those who have learnt from Christ the secret of things are to be "never despairing." Calm, hopeful, persevering, immovable, we are to continue in the faith of the Cross, and are to be "filled with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope."

II. A GOOD MAN IS FORBIDDEN TO DESPAIR.

The tree is known by its fruits.

Despair is not a fruit of the renewed life. Like Paul, a saint may be perplexed but he will not be in despair, persecuted but not forsaken, cast down but not destroyed. Despair is selfishness in blossom, it says, "you can do no good to your fellows, then live for yourself." Surely this is not of God? It is faithlessness and prayerlessness: it gives over to the devil the man whom Christ seeks to rescue. It is unhappiness, for if I despair of others I shall inevitably suffer with them. God wants His people to be unselfish, faithful, prayerful, happy, and they can only attain to this position of vantage as they are never despairing.

Despair is contagious.

Moody, that inveterate Hoper, was accustomed to say, "God never uses a discouraged man." "Let us go with Him, that we may die with Him" is not the cry that will rally men to Christ. "Forward men and be defeated" was never the word of a victorious general. If we despair of men they will never escape from their own despair. The mother's faith in her boy has often

been the only thing that bound him to virtue, if that had failed he had slipped. Sir Philip Sidney says, "who will adhere to him who abandons himself?"

Other men will despair if men of God despair, but our springs of hope lie so deep that their despair need not infect us. Because we wish them to cling to Christ we will not abandon ourselves, nor them. Abandoned men and women should be unknown to the Church of Christ. Think how grace comes into unlikeliest hearts; that after many days there comes the harvest; that we shall reap if we faint not; that he that would have a cake must tarry the grinding. Great works require long preparation, the highest forms of being are of the slowest growth, our work is for eternity, and he scarce spoke with exaggeration who wrote:—

'Tis worth a good man's best of life,
'Tis worth a thousand years of strife,
If he can lessen but by one,
The countless ills beneath the sun.

Despair is the negation of God.

He is supreme. Is anything too hard for God? If we are tempted to ask, "Can God?" let us hear the answer in the echo, "God can." He is not an impassive spectator of the scene, He is not oblivious of the desires He Himself has put into your heart. The responsibility for the work of saving men is not yours: if it were you might despair, but though He allows you and me to be linked with Him in the accomplishment of it, the work is His. How unworthy, how un-Christ-like then it would be to despair!

For right is right, since God is God,
And right the day must win,
To doubt would be disloyalty,
To falter would be sin.

We are poor judges of the battle : we can scarce tell defeat from victory. Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance and my God.

The day after the great fire in Chicago a man whose premises had been burnt up erected on the smoking ruins a notice, "All gone but Wife and Children and Hope." This was the first part of the announcement ; beneath were the words, "Business will be Resumed in the Morning." That is the spirit in which every servant of Christ must face the work of helping men for His sake. God and hope are ours : despair is itself a curse, it spreads, it forgets God, therefore we must be "never despairing."

III. A GOOD MAN IS SUPERIOR TO DESPAIR.

He becomes like God.

Having the life of God imparted to him in Christ, he is transformed into the character of God. God is the God of hope : he becomes a man of hope. It is written that we are saved by hope ; that does not mean that our salvation is only a thing we hope for, but that having an assurance of our own security we evermore have something in life to hope for. We dare not despair of ourselves and that keeps us hopeful for others ; we do not despair of others and that makes us hopeful about ourselves. The Christian man keeps

young because he maintains his hopefulness. The old men of the age are not those with grey hairs, they are those who, though young in years, have exhausted every pleasure of existence, who have sucked the juice out of life, and, already jaded, have no hope of new joys or new visions. *Blasé*, cynical, bitter—they are the old men. The aged saint who lives for his Saviour and his God gets younger with the years; he is a son of the Highest, and when asked about his future he can give the answer Judson gave when asked about the prospects of his Mission in Burmah, "My prospects are as bright as the promises of God."

He acts as God acts.

God is kind to the unthankful and the evil: the man who is never despairing learns also to love his enemies; he does not count them necessary enemies, the unthankful may yet become grateful and evil men may be won to the good. The Lord Jesus tells us we are to do good, to give, to yield, to pray, to bless, to forgive. We cannot conform to this pattern if we give way to despair. A son of the Highest, if disappointed at first, does not cease to love and to give, he seeks to do his deed in a better way. Perhaps his failure was the result of his method. Baulked a thousand times he tries again, upheld by the energy of the Spirit. He expects little, but attempts much; he does not think of what others might do for him, but of what they expect him to do for them, and he does it, does it even if they do not deserve it, does it if only it appears to be really good. Such a man is not only a son of the Highest, but he becomes known as a child of God. The world

heeds our professions and raptures but little, evil men have a keen eye for that which is really good, they can see through our psalm-singing and our crowds, and if there be not behind it all the practical life of sympathy and brotherhood, the loving heart to devise, and the ready hand to help, they may be excused if they are somewhat sceptical as to our faith. Let us not sit down supine, men are to be helped as long as we have the chance of helping them. The Christian man is never despairing.

He has a great reward.

His growing likeness to Christ, his increasing touch with men, the acceptance the hopeful man has from his fellows, his own happiness and sweetness, these are no insignificant reward. Measure it by the contrast between his lot and the lot of the despairing, who are shunned and unjoyous. The greatest reward is his Father's smile, and he who in Christ's name and for Christ's sake seeks to bless men knows that he is well pleasing to the God who loves the world. Between the personal happiness and the promised crown there is also the reward of achievement; it is the man who will not be denied who is not denied, the man who hopes on and who hopes ever, not despising the difficulties but not despairing because of them, knowing that greater is He that is with him than all they that can be against him, that is the man who wins.

Time would fail to tell of those who have snatched victory from the jaws of defeat; of the heroes of the early church; of the martyr hosts who went singing to their doom; of the devout men who kept the light

burning in the dark ages ; of the Reformers who faced all odds for the truth of Christ ; of the philanthropists who championed the unpopular cause until the consciences of men were aroused to sweep away the accursed thing ; of the missionaries of the Cross who in spite of breaking hearts toil on in hope of the Coming Day ; of despised and forgotten workers who never falter in the Chosen Path.

Men who never turned their back, but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph.

The record of these is on high. Enough here to sound two or three notes of encouragement.

In my native city there was a man in a rescue home whose behaviour was so intolerable that he was expelled twelve times. He came back again and asked to be received. The lady superintendent thought of the care and patience that had been bestowed on him, and said, "You are the meanest man in Belfast." He did not dispute it, but said, "Please give me one more chance." She did, and the thirteenth time she was rewarded, the man was changed, and the word "hopeless" is erased from her thought.

One of the noble band of deaconesses—Sister Daisy—tells of a woman in a model lodging-house in London who had become hideous with misery and disease. At first she would not admit her visitor, but by and by she said the Sisters might come in if they would not speak about God. They went and tried to show the love of

God by deeds of love, until at length the icy heart thawed and she told them her story. She was the daughter of a City Missionary, and had sunk so low that she often had to be dragged home drunk from the public house. Ten years before she had said in a drunken fit, "If there be a God, let Him strike me now," and ever since then she had lain helpless on a heap of rags, waited on by a little girl of the neighbourhood for a mere pittance. At length when she was visited one morning all the hideousness was gone, her face was radiant: Jesus Christ had come to her and had showed her His pierced hands and had spoken forgiveness. After that the neighbours often came in to see *the woman whom the Christian's God had changed so*. And during the remaining three months of her life she led three of them to Christ. One a month; that was a good record, a better than yours, probably, whose eyes are greeted by these words.

Dean Burgon tells of the deeds of a brave man—Marriott—during an epidemic of cholera and small-pox. One woman was in despair and cried continually "Too late! Too late! Too late!" Much care was given to her case and many prayers offered for her, but still there came the same refrain, "Too late for me." Near the end he said to her "But you do believe in the love of those around you, now Jesus sends it to you?" With what seemed the last effort of life she raised herself and said, "Yes, it is love." And the little love of earth acknowledged seemed to open her heart to the great love of Christ, for when the last struggle came she said the words they had entreated her to use, "Jesus save

me," and as she passed they felt their prayer had been heard, and the despairing soul had been plucked as a brand from the burning by the ministry of one who was never despairing.

O men and women who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ and who seek to follow in His footsteps, take these words to-day and lay them upon your hearts. Never despairing! Never despairing! Never despairing! They are His words: they are the dominant words of His life and of His teaching, who when man had sunk to his lowest came to lift him up and to give him a place on His throne, who to-day exalted at the right hand of God is expecting until His enemies become footstools, who Himself will not fail nor be discouraged until He has set righteousness in the earth, who will not let one deed of gratitude to Him pass unknown or unnoticed but will say "Ye did it to Me," who shuts from us now the knowledge of much of the blessing He sends to others through us, lest we should be exalted above measure, but who treasures up for all His faithful an exceeding great reward, and who, having Himself led the way, bids all His children to live as He lived, and to work as He worked, "never despairing."

VII

PRAVER, A VITAL FORCE

“Prayer also shall be made for Him.”—PSA. lxxii. 15.

THE disputed question as to the authorship of this Psalm may perhaps best be settled by supposing that David first spoke the sentiments contained in it, and that thereafter Solomon cast it into poetic form. But a grander figure than either Solomon or David emerges as we read. Here we discover David's greater Son, who is arrayed in more splendour than even Solomon in all his glory. It is He who continues to live, His name it is that shall endure for ever, the kingdom is His kingdom, it is His glory that shall fill all the earth, no other, and in Him, and only in Him, shall all the families of the earth be blessed. The prayers of David could not have been ended unless they had found their resting-place in Christ, and it is evermore one of the marks of His reign that “prayer also shall be for Him continually, and daily shall He be praised.”

When so many are questioning the efficacy of prayer, and many who would still give it a place are inclined to

look upon it but as a pious exercise, it is increasingly necessary to emphasise the fact that prayer really avails to receive blessing from the hand of God. With this text as a guide, we shall see that prayer is a vital force in the kingdom of Christ, that the sort of prayer here mentioned proves, illustrates and justifies this statement, and that of all prayer this kind of prayer is the highest and the best.

I. PRAYER IS A VITAL FORCE IN THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST.

God has ordained it.

In this prophecy of the King's reign prayer has at least an equal place with gold in the inauguration and continuance of His sway. "To Him shall be given of the gold of Sheba" is no more certain than that "prayer also shall be made for Him continually," and it is significant that prayer stands side by side with praise. It is no accident or afterthought brought in to mitigate the original plan, the fact that it is in the prophecy shows it is part of the plan.

In this scientific age, when we are realising in such a high degree the splendour of God's creation and the inflexibility of the laws by which it is governed, the question often rises whether it is any use to pray. The Engineer of the Universe, it is argued, is so great that it is an insult to give Him advice; His works are so stupendous that He can have no inclination or purpose to turn aside to every one who has some special need unsatisfied by the ordinary working of His law. The majesty of God as manifested in the things He has made seems to make prayer almost an impertinence, and we are

told that our place is to bow before God's law and be still.

Perhaps if we knew God better we should find that He is greater than anything Nature can teach us. What if prayer be one of His laws? part of the fixed order? What if it be a thing not having its origin in the creature, but in the Creator? not introduced into the cosmos but a part of it, even from the beginning? If we came to a clearer understanding of things we might discover that amid all the other forces by which God manifests His thought, prayer itself is a force, not a something to oppose or alter other laws, but itself a law working in perfect harmony with all else that God ordains. In this view of it, so far from prayer being an attempt to frustrate the purpose of God, it is seen to be a part of the purpose; it has its place in the prophecy and in actual evolution of things.

It is therefore necessary.

Those who insist that prayer is useless—and alas! the number who act out such a creed is legion—are accustomed to argue in this fashion, if they argue at all; they say that God is either good or He is bad. If He is bad (may He forgive the blasphemy of the thought) then prayer is useless, for He will not answer it. If He is good, it is equally useless, for He will give what is good whether we ask Him or not. This logic is very specious, it makes an end of the matter, and it would be unanswerable if the only object in God's mind were the working out of things, if He only dealt with insensate creatures.

But there are men to be considered. Men who may become men indeed, men who have their will, and who

may be joined to God for ever, or for ever seek to live apart from Him. God's purpose, in Christ Jesus, is to bind them to Himself, and evermore encourage in them the spirit of children. This He cannot accomplish without prayer. His best gifts cannot be ours unless we ask for them. We may need them above everything, He may yearn that they should be ours, but because of what He is, and because of what we are, the things that are most worth the having cannot be given without prayer.

7 We can imagine a case, even among ourselves, where there may be the utmost willingness on one side to bestow, and an urgent desire on the other side to possess, and yet without a prayer there could be neither bestowal nor possession ; when to give without a prayer would be to mar the gift, to wrong the giver, and to injure the recipient. Suppose a woman's heart to be won by an ardent lover, one who loves truly, who is desirous above all things that she should be his, but who yet is chary of his words. On her side she is willing and eager to give herself to the man who has conquered her ; on his side he eagerly awaits the day when his love shall be crowned. *But unless he ask he will never have.* It is not enough for him to say " If she is good and if she loves me she will do everything even without being asked." The fact is that, unless she is asked, she positively cannot give her maiden love with all the beautiful bloom upon it. There must be a prayer. She might, without a prayer, give something else, but she absolutely cannot give *that*. She may indeed, in delicate ways known only to women, lead her lover to understand that if he ask she will not refuse, but for his sake as well as her own, for the sake of present

respect and of future happiness, he must ask or else he will never receive. The sweet and beautiful gift can only be his by prayer.)

If this be conceivably true between two of God's creatures, why should it be inconceivable as between God and men?

Now I do not put this case forward as an illustration of the relationship between men and God, but only of the fact that, even in view of the greatest beneficence there may be occasion for prayer. The relationship of the believer to God is that of a child to the Father; and this of itself is an argument for prayer, for no benevolent father will wish his child merely to take what the general routine of the home provides, without at any time expressing a desire or a preference. Concerning the man who has not yet come to full assurance on the matter, Charles Kingsley well says "that those two words, 'Our Father,' if he can really believe them in their richness and depth, will make his doubts vanish in a moment, and prayer seem the most natural and reasonable of all acts." Because God is the Father of those who have faith in Jesus Christ He desires intercourse with them, He intends to educate them by bringing them into direct contact with Himself, and therefore He has determined that the choice gifts of His love can only be given to those who ask: prayer is not only an ordained force for the progress of the kingdom, it is absolutely necessary to the fulfilment of God's highest plans.

Moreover, it is effective.

Blessings are actually given in answer to the cry of God's children. Prayer is not only a pious exercise that

makes the man who offers it better, it really gains gifts of God. The reflex blessing of prayer on the human heart is as nothing in comparison with its practical results. It is, in itself, a prophecy of the coming boon. When we see that it is part of the plan we can understand that it is like the shadow coming before the approaching gift, God being behind both. It is effective, it is followed by results, and in a very real sense produces them.

We ourselves are witnesses. There are many who hear me who have proved that God answers prayer. I myself remember the first time I touched God, and received what I asked ; it was an insignificant thing, but the answer was not insignificant. We cannot give mathematical proof of this, those who will not believe without that must for ever remain unbelievers. But no such proof should be expected, for the God and Father to whom we pray is unseen, and the hand that gives the gift is hidden. Yet we are sure that our prayers prevail. If a daughter asks of her father a gift, and presently finds it on her dressing table, is she wrong in thinking that her father caused it to be put there ? If a son asks a boon, and in a week's time discovers it on his desk, is he not entitled to argue that it is his father's answer ? Neither daughter nor son saw the father purchase the thing, nor put it where they found it : they have no *mathematical* proof that it is their father's doing, but they are quite certain of the fact, and unhesitatingly they thank their father for his goodness. You say, perhaps after all they may be mistaken, it may have been merely a coincidence, or somebody else may have overheard the request and may have fulfilled it. But if the process is repeated

many times, by different members of the family under varying circumstances, and answers come to all, is it possible for them to be mistaken? Lifting the argument up into the family of God where such coincidences have been multiplied a million times, we know and are persuaded that God actually does give gifts in direct response to the petitions of faithful souls.

We ourselves have put the matter to the test. Many a time we have prayed, and the answer has come with such lightning speed that we have been provoked to pray and pray again. We have been tempted to say, "It is wonderful," though faith has instantly rebuked us in view of the promises of God. In very truth—

God answers sharp and sudden on some prayers,
And thrusts the thing we asked for in our faces—
A gauntlet with a gift in 't,

challenging us to ask more. And if at times we have been kept waiting we can still, in the delayed answer, trace the effect to the cause, and glorify Him whose ear is not heavy that it cannot hear, and whose arm is not shortened that it cannot save.

We are sure that prayer prevails indeed in spite of the fact that some of our requests are refused. Prayer is none the less effective because our Father in His wisdom does not give everything His children demand. Much depends on who prays and on what is asked : God is good at all times—

Good when He gives, supremely good,
Nor less when He denies ;
E'en crosses from His sovereign hand,
Are blessings in disguise.

L You remember Mrs. Copley, one of the oldest members of the Leicester Bible and Domestic Mission. She used to visit the Infirmary and bear a very fearless testimony not only to the patients but to the doctors and nurses. She was pre-eminently a woman of prayer, and one day some of the young doctors meeting her in one of the wards, thought they would have some merriment at her expense. One of them shut the door, and, putting his back to it, said—

“You are always telling us that God answers prayer?”

“Yes, sir,” she answered, “I am sure my Father hears His children when they call.”

“Well,” he said, “I am very hard up just now ; do you think if I asked God for a five-pound note He would give it to me?”

That was a poser, and the group expected the Bible-woman to modify her faith. But grace was given to her for the occasion, and she replied by asking another question.

“If you were introduced to the Prince of Wales, sir,” she said, “would you think it right at once to put your hand in his pocket for a five-pound note?”

“Oh, no,” he laughingly responded, “certainly not.”

“You would need to know him pretty well before you could ask him for it?” she said, pursuing her advantage.

Of course the doctor assented.

“And you need to know my Father well, too, before you can ask Him for five-pound notes,” she continued : an answer wherein there is a great deal of the philosophy of prayer.

L

Some years ago I suggested an illustration on this subject which, judging by the use that others have since made of it, seems to be appropriate. In Fleet Street I am told that there is an office of a Scottish newspaper connected by its own direct wire with the headquarters in Edinburgh. Two reporters live on the premises, at the top of the house. On one occasion, I understand, one of them came home very late and knocked at the door, and rang, endeavouring to get in. But his companion was so soundly asleep that he could not make him hear. What was to be done? Where could he get help? It occurred to him to try whether he could not reach the sleeper by way of the head office, so he telegraphed to Edinburgh and stated his dilemma. In a little while a message was flashed over the direct wire from the office there to the sleeper in London; hearing the click of the machine he hastily rose and with astonishment read its contents—"Open the door," and as his belated friend again rang the bell, he realised the position of things, and admitted him. That message to Edinburgh was not just a pious exercise, not something to keep the tired and disappointed man patient. It was effective for its purpose, it changed the situation, it gained him his desire. Effort is not to be despised, but often when our best efforts fail, if in faith we flashed our requests to God, we should find that even the earthly purpose is best accomplished, and the hearts of men most easily moved, by way of the Throne of Him who has the hearts of all men in His control and whose ears are ever open to our cry.

II. THE SORT OF PRAYER 'SPOKEN OF IN THE TEXT EXPLAINS, ILLUSTRATES, AND JUSTIFIES THESE STATEMENTS.

The force of the text depends upon the preposition.

We are familiar with the thought of praying *to* Christ : we know what it is to pray *through* Christ ; we may even understand what it is to pray *with* Christ, for He is our great Intercessor and unites His pleas to ours ; and we unite our pleas to His when we ask the Father to give Him the heathen as His inheritance.

But this is something more. We are to pray *for* Christ. Do not shrink from the startling thought ; surely if we may work for Christ we may pray for Christ. He lives : this prayer is the corollary of His life ; it is more precious to Him than the gold of Sheba, and does more for His triumph ; it is, in fact, the sure forerunner of the praises which shall yet throng to crown His head.

The place of the prayer depends upon the conjunction.

We have said that prayer is ordained, that it is necessary, and that it is effective. Let us test the statement by this particular case. It is quite certain that Christ is to live and to prevail : it is equally certain that prayer is to be made for Him. "Also," fix the thought on that word. Now if His triumph is irrespective of our prayer, He will triumph whether we pray or not. But the same prophecy that foretells His triumph foretells our prayers, and if one is unnecessary the other may be uncertain. Perish the thought ! No, the one is equally the will of God with the other. Prayer is to be the great means of bringing in the kingdom : because Christ lives, prayer will be made : because prayer is made His kingdom will

continue to grow. He Himself has taught us thus to pray : when we say to the Father, " Thy kingdom come," we are truly praying for Christ, and the prayer is necessary to the coming of the kingdom.

III. PRAYER FOR CHRIST IS THE HIGHEST FORM OF PRAYER.

For He is the highest.

It is much more important that He shall prosper than I or you. He is greater. He lives, I die. He lives not for Himself but for others ; His prosperity will mean that abundant grace shall come to others ; and my prayer for Him will help to hasten the day of His glory. So in praying for Him I am actually praying for all His people. Surely such prayer is the highest. Indeed, the Lord taught us this when He told His disciples to pray on behalf of the Name and the Kingdom, and the Will, before they asked even for daily bread. He put first things first.

Such prayer leads us away from self.

Even our prayers may increase our selfishness, if we always pray for only ourselves, and our own circle. The practice of prayer for Christ saves us from this. It delivers us too from the subtle temptation which assails us of being interested only in the little bit of work which immediately surrounds us, and it continually reminds us that all His work is His. It widens our sympathies, and lifts us away from sectarianism : if blessing comes on any Church we are glad, since we have been praying for Him, and His are all the Churches.

Such prayer causes us to identify ourselves with Christ.

As we pray all our hopes become centred in Christ,

and He makes us sharers in His compassion for men. Our greatest grief is when He is dishonoured, our highest joy when He is glorified. We take an intelligent interest in the progress of His kingdom, we pray for labourers to be thrust forth into the harvest, we remember them when they go ; we pray for conversions, for the Church, for the glorious Epiphany of the Great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. We are on the look-out for answers. Our lives become devoted to the cause that demands our petitions. We cease to hinder by our conduct what we seek to further by our prayer. We feel that Christ's things are ours, more truly ours than the things we once thought of as our own.

Such prayer is the surest way to all blessing.

If our prayer *for* Christ be answered, many of our prayers addressed *to* Him will be answered, and many of our prayers for ourselves will cease to be offered as we come into fuller conformity to His mind. His triumph will fulfil many of our desires, and to be recompensed by His presence will be more to us than all the things we shall have been denied.

Therefore let us pray, let us pray without ceasing, let us chiefly pray for Christ and His kingdom—all other things shall be added : let us put in motion this effective force, for more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of. So shall the kingdom come. And be assured that those who keep by Christ's side in prayer shall certainly be by His side in glory.

VIII

MASTER MOTIVES TO PRAISE

“Praise ye the Lord ; for it is good to sing praises unto our God ; for it is pleasant ; and praise is comely.”—PSA. cxlvii. 1.

NO verse in the Bible sets forth the motives to praise better than this. So glorious is the theme that three other Psalms have to be laid under contribution for this stanza. Psalm xxxiii. 1 tells us that praise is comely ; Psalm xcii. 1 that it is good, and Psalm cxxxv. 3 that it is pleasant, here all three are combined in one great overwhelming call to praise.

I believe with Milton that there are no Psalms like the Psalms of David, no politics like the politics of the prophets, and no statesmanship like the statesmanship of the Sermon on the Mount. You can easily test the superiority of the Bible Psalms if you turn to any of our books of praise and search for the hymns of praise. There are very few of them : many hymns call us to praise, and declare an intention of praising, but very seldom do we find those which directly offer ascription of thanksgiving. Just as in these days there

is much preaching about the gospel, but comparatively little gospel preaching, there are many hymns about praise, but comparatively few hymns of praise. The best praise pieces outside the Bible belong to the early Church. Amongst the early song handed down to us we find such an anthem, for instance, as that of the eighth century which is very hard to match in modern days—

Almighty Christ ! to Thee our voices sing
Glory for evermore. To Thee we bring
An endless Hallelujah.

The Psalms of David, like Christian experience, begin with the blessing of the separated life, and they end with a torrent of praise. The final four Psalms each commence and finish with Hallelujah !

There has been some discussion lately whether in a notable hymn of Watts's he wrote of *princes* crowning Jesus Christ, or of *praises* crowning Him. The couplet runs, as I think its author wrote it—

For Him shall endless prayer be made,
And praises throng to crown His head.

We may all share in Christ's coronation ; none are too weak to bring their praises, none so mighty but He is mightier. Let our praises be so multiplied that they shall throng around that brow which once for us was thorn-crowned.

The motives I would urge upon you are very simple. Praise should be provoked, first, because of what the Lord is : and second, because of what praise is. What *He* is and what *it* is. These are the two motives.

I. BECAUSE OF WHAT GOD IS.

His character is seen in His works.

His understanding is infinite, there is no limit to His power. He is in all things that He has created. The same power made a world and moulds a raindrop. The same wisdom names the stars and knows each blade of grass on the mountain-side. Trace down the Psalm and we find it all there. We look up to the stars and discover so many that we name them "The Milky Way." He knows each one. We sweep the grass down with the scythe into an indistinguished heap, but He knows every blade on the sward and has not made two of them alike. Praise Him for such greatness !

See, too, how He has made the world. Though Satan has marred its beauty you can see the traces of the original handiwork. Even in the shadows His goodness appears. Some would have had the world without shadows, but that would have been to rob the earth of beauty, for all its loveliness is in its shadows. There are no shadows, I believe, in the desert of Sahara, nor is there anything to admire. Praise God for the shadows then as well as the brightness.

I thank Thee,-Lord, that all our joy
Is touched with pain ;
That shadows fall on brightest hours
That thorns remain ;
So that earth's bliss may be our guide
And not our chain.

Think, too, how He has made *us*: with a small capacity for pain and a great capacity for joy ; and with a short memory of pain and a long memory of pleasure.

Even the pauses in the midst of suffering are full of an exquisite sense of rest. It is true that evil descends to the third and fourth generation, but God keeps goodness and mercy to thousands of generations of those who do His bidding. Not even a sparrow falls without our Father: the sparrows do fall, remember; we might think that if God cared for them they would never be permitted to know harm, but though to them and to us disaster comes, yet it never comes to them nor to us without God. If our spirit be not warped we shall never lack cause for praise. A friend of mine tells me that the way to be always thankful for the weather is to keep a garden; if it is fine you can enjoy the flowers; if it is wet you can stay indoors and say how good the rain is for the garden. If our soul be like a watered garden and we recognise that the Lord cares for us, trial and sunshine will alike bring praise, and we shall ever be able to say, as an old man I know always begins his public prayers, "Lord, we thank Thee for our being and for our well-being."

The motive of all His works God finds in Himself.

God made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel. In His acts we find our praise provoked, but a truer note will come to us if, like Moses, we enter into the plan and purpose of God, and learn His ways, His methods. We shall be able then to sing—

Praise to the Holiest in the height,
And in the depths be praise :
In all His words most wonderful,
Most sure in all His ways.

His people find peculiar grace. I go very heartily with the sentiment that as a nation we should give God special praise. We have it in our Psalm, "He hath not dealt so with any nation," and we should be recreant to our history if we forgot to adore our God for His national goodness to us. Let not our successes bring pride but praise. But the Israel of God to-day is not any particular nation of the earth, but that holy nation, that peculiar people chosen out of it. Surely praise should come from them! If you want to praise well, get down before the Cross, there we see His ways most perfectly. Think of His redemption, of the spring of it, the love of His heart; of the mystery of it, the pouring out of His soul to the death; of the result of it, the bringing of many sons to glory. When you take the cup of salvation you will give thanks. Oh, believe that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and you cannot help but praise; your spirit will glow with ardour, and if you want words you can scarcely find better than those of the mission hymn—

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood,
Sealed my pardon with His blood,
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

Think of those He chooses! He gathereth together the outcasts of Israel, He takes the beggar and sets Him among princes, He lifteth up the meek and lowly. And think of what He does for them! He builds up Zion with such as these. He comes to those who know sin and He makes them hate it, to those who have had experience of sin and whom He will so save that they

will not sin—no, not for a thousand worlds. He raises them up to the perfect height of holiness in the presence of His glory and makes them peers of His realm. Oh let us praise Him !

See the magnificent ease and swiftness of His acts.

He casteth forth His ice like morsels, His snow like wool. His word runneth very swiftly. He speaks—and it is done. His wind blows and the water that was frost-bound flows. This is true both in nature and in grace. If you are full of gladness praise God, remember how easily He can take away your joy : if you are in trouble praise Him, remember how simple a thing it is with Him to change your sorrow into delight. By one touch of His finger on the lever He can reverse all the machinery.

All our spiritual delights come at His bidding. When the Lord turns our captivity we are like them that dream, our mouth is filled with laughter and our tongue with singing, and the more we know of the Lord the more we shall praise Him. They that dwell in His house are still—what? It is a very dangerous thing to friendship to travel with your friends, you find them out so when you live with them, even on a holiday ; but when you live with God you praise Him more, for you find out something of the greatness of His loving heart. “They that dwell in Thy house will still be praising Thee.” They will learn in everything to give thanks.

For He alone is worthy. The Seven Songs of Revelation, each giving praise for a different thing, and suggesting to us, perhaps, the division of the book, may

be learned and sung by all the saints. In Chapter IV. we may learn to praise God for creation. In Chapter V. for redemption, the Lamb is worthy to open the book and redeemed history begins. In Chapter VII. for salvation, Christ not only redeems us but He brings us safely through all the tribulation. In Chapter XI. at the end of it, that Christ is to take the power and reign, that already He is ruling among the nations and will soon manifest His might. In Chapter XIV. the new Song—a song without words—the song of those who are without fault, the perfectly sanctified. Praise Him for His sanctifying grace. In Chapter XVI. the song of Moses and the Lamb, not only are we to be made holy, but all our foes are to be destroyed ; think of the perfect deliverance given by Moses, and begin to praise that you too shall have as perfect a release. If we had time this would be a most interesting topic ; not so much as a dog wagged his tongue against the people of God, not one enemy that pursued them was left, all sank like lead in the waters, they sank like a stone, and in the hundred and fifth Psalm we read of the people “that there was not one feeble person among all their tribes.” What a salvation for them and for us ! In Chapter XIX. we have the final song when Babylon is fallen. There are but two women in the Apocalypse, a good one and a bad one ; there are but two Churches, the Apostolic and the Apostate, the good is to get the victory through Christ, and the bad woman, the apostate Church, is to be for ever defeated when the fair Bride of the Lamb comes to her espousal.

The first motive to provoke praise then is the wonder-

ful Lord to whom our praises are to be rendered. Learn more of Him. Live more with Him and you will praise Him more, until perhaps you will find language, even the language of the Psalms, too unworthy of what He has taught you of Himself, and you will sometimes just be silent and adore.

And when we find the praise of Thee
A task beyond our powers,
We say 'a perfect God is He,
And He is fully ours.'

II. BECAUSE OF WHAT PRAISE IS.

It is good.

If we praise God as we ought we shall be kept from praising ourselves. Surely that is good. I have heard that most self-made men are very apt to praise their maker; indeed we are all liable to sing the praises of self. The sure way of escaping this danger is to fill your heart and mouth with praise to God.

Praise leads us to value truly what we receive. The goodness becomes great when the memory of it is abundantly uttered. When we are silent we lose the sense of God's favour, but as we speak forth our thanks we understand better the quality and beauty of that which we have received. I once asked a young lady if she were a Christian, and she answered, "Do you remember a sermon you preached once on your return from your holiday, on the text, 'Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.' Well I think I was a redeemed soul before that, but until then I had never said so." She had never realised the blessing that was hers till she confessed it, and when we are grateful how better can we

"say so" than by our songs. We do not sing enough, and our gratitude often wanes because we give it no outlet. Let us praise.

This is the way to get more. The praiseful saint can be entrusted safely with fuller blessing and by his praise he is prepared to receive it. The fact that praise brings further gifts underlies our common expression, "thanking you in anticipation," and is set forth in the couplet, "Glory to God for all the grace I have not tasted yet." But it is not only praise for the coming blessing that is needed; let us most truly praise for what we have, and God will give us more. I knew a man who had been working overtime, and when he received his extra wages he could not be content until he had spent the money. It seemed to burn a hole in his pocket. You will admire his affection rather than his wisdom when I tell you that he bought his wife a bonnet with it. He took it home in triumph and displayed its charms to her astonished eyes. Happily it pleased her, and she was loud in her expressions of thanks. Indeed she embarrassed him with her gratitude until the matter ended by his saying "Wife, you are so thankful that I'll buy you a shawl the next time." Her praise for one gift got the promise of another. If you will receive a leaf from my own experience, I can truly say that I have never yet thanked God for anything but He has always given me something greater to thank Him for; as if He said, "What! do you thank Me for so little, *there* is something to thank Me for—Take that." And I have gone away with the greater gift. So the volume of praise grows. Of course we must not praise in order to be

enriched, but if we praise because we are really praiseful, enriched we shall certainly be. Praise is the plural of Pray.

Prayers and praises go in pairs
They have praises who have prayers.

It is pleasant.

A Puritan writer says there are some things good and not pleasant, and there are some things pleasant and not good, but there is one thing both good and pleasant, and that is for brethren to dwell together in unity. To which I would only add that there is another thing good and pleasant, when brethren dwell in unity that they should unite in praise.

Praise is the instinct of the regenerate soul. What is natural is always pleasant. When Christ appears the first impulse is to say "O Lord, I will praise Thee, though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away and Thou comfortest me." When we are taken from the horrible pit and the miry clay the new song is put into our mouth, even praise. There is a command in the Epistle to the Ephesians that we should be filled with the Spirit: Do you know the next word? With your Bibles shut can you remember it? It is "SINGING:" the man filled with the Spirit is sure to be filled with praise.

If your joys abound, praise God. It will shed a glow on the mountain, put a bloom on the grape, add moss to your rose. If sorrow is your portion, praise; however ill your lot you can find something to evoke thanksgiving. I never yet knew a hard case that might not

have been worse. I like that story of old Auntie. It is an American story. Her chimney smoked, and somebody said it was very trying. "Aye, but honey," she said, "isn't it good I have something to make a smoke with." They saw her eating crusts and suggested that it seemed a pity an old woman should not have something better. But she said, "Is it not a blessing that I have such a good set of teeth." After some years most of her teeth were gone. "How now, Auntie, can you praise God still? You have only two teeth left." "Aye, but sonny," she answered, "isn't it a good thing the one is opposite the other?"

Yes, praise is pleasant, pleasant to us, and we may believe that it is pleasant also to our Lord. He delights in the praises of Israel. Therefore often walk abroad in the pleasaunce of praise.

It is comely.

What can we do but praise? Gifts are bountifully given to us, and we have nothing to offer in return but thanks. We can only give Christ our sins and our praises, if He take the one shall we withhold the other? Nay, let Him have all. It will be well to form the habit of praising for the gifts in detail, not giving one act of praise for all the mercies of the day, but praise for each one. Nothing that we can bring to God is acceptable unless it be filled with praise, but I believe the way to get people to give of their substance is to set them praising. When they open their mouths to praise they open their purses to give. After an absence from our week-evening service I found in my vestry on my return an envelope with a gift in it, and the somewhat cryptic

sentence accompanying it, "Sweet cane with money." I could not understand it until I met the preacher who had taken my place and discovered that had been the text of his sermon which had such a speedy result. Sweet cane with money, prayers with thanksgiving, service with praise, these are things acceptable in God's sight.

No garment becomes the saint like the garment of praise instead of the spirit of heaviness. It makes the uncomely comely, and the plain beautiful. Praise is the only thing that answers to the distinguishing grace we have received, and if we do not believe that grace is distinguishing what do we believe about it?

We shall see that praise on our part is comely, if we lay hold of the marvellous truth that by and by God will praise us. There is a verse in the first epistle to the Corinthians (iv. 5) which gives us a wonderful thought about the future. It refers to the saints, and it tells us to judge nothing before the time when the Lord shall bring to light the hidden things, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts, and then shall every man be judged of God. That last clause is how we should naturally read it, but a far more glorious word is written. *Then shall every man have praise of God.* Think of it. The poorest and meanest and most unworthy child of God shall have praise of God. If He means to praise us all, shall we not begin to praise Him more? and if we are to praise Him for ever, shall we not begin to praise Him better here?

Men and women of God we do not sing enough, especially in our family worship, and at our daily tasks.

Is any merry let him sing Psalms. There are abundant motives to praise : we may find them everywhere ; and as we continue in the blessed art we shall become adepts, until in the words of a dear friend of mine, and one well known to you—C. H. Spurgeon—in a rhapsody he wrote in his later years, we may be able to say—

Hallelujah ! O my Lord !
Torrents from my heart are poured !
I am carried clean away,
Praising, praising, all the day.

IX

CHRISTIAN LIVING AND DYING

“To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”—PHIL. i. 21.

THE man who wrote these words had weighed well the problem of life, and had found its solution. He had come apart from the crowd and viewed things in their personal relation. Whatsoever others thought or did, he was able to say, “As for me, this is my definite aim and hope ; there is no longer any room for hesitation or question about it ; to me to live is Christ.” This settled purpose had ripened into an experience. His was not the life regulated by passing whims, its plan was arranged, and its end was sure. To-day he is not disappointed, and were he to return to us he would but say the same words with the added emphasis of more perfect knowledge.

When I was a lad I heard an old minister announce this text, and declare that he had never ventured till then to preach from it, because he thought it was beyond him. At the time I wondered, for it seemed to me so plain : but I can now enter somewhat into his

feeling. There is more here than any of us understand, more perhaps than we shall ever understand, and yet my boyhood's sentiment was not astray, for the very elements of our faith are here, and the simplicities and sublimities both claim a foothold in these majestic words, "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Our thoughts, then, are to be occupied with two things: Living and Dying. It cannot be said that these things are unpractical, they concern us all. Living and Dying! We must live: probably we must die; it is worth while to seek the best way for both.

I. LIVING.

What is the problem?

It is fourfold. Here am I a living man, and if I am to rise to the height of my manhood there are four things I must do. I must make the most of the great gift that is entrusted to me—my life: I must honour most the Giver of that gift: I must help most others who like myself are living: and I must leave the world a better place than I found it. That, I think, is the whole problem.

Just as when a daughter goes to school, or a son to college, the same four things present themselves. The son has to make the most of his chance, to please to the utmost of his power his father who gave it to him, to help the other students as far as he can, and to leave the college with a better prestige and spirit than he found it, that those who follow may be helped because he has gone before.

That is it. The whole problem is to get the best I can from life, to let God receive the greatest glory

possible from it, to cheer and bless as many others as I can, and to leave "the world a better world for man's brief earthly dwelling."

What answers have been given to the problem?

No answer can be sufficient that does not meet the whole of the case, and that only which joins all in perfect harmony can be true.

Many methods have been suggested. One boldly proclaims that the way is for each man to live for himself, to seek his own interests, to push his own way, and in the long run that will be the best for all. But this quite evidently neglects some of the factors in the problem. Well then, let a man live for his home and for his kindred! But in that case what about God? and what about those who are outside? This answer falls short. To multiply cosy homes is excellent, but surely life can be made nobler than this. Yes, you say, it can be nobler; live for the people, be a public man, a politician, a patriot; take an interest in municipal and imperial affairs. Good; but are you quite sure that this is the sure way to honour God? And what about those who by their circumstances are debarred from any public action, and denied any public influence? It is a very noble life-purpose which is expressed in the lines—

I live for those who love me,
For those who know me true,
For the heaven that smiles above me,
And awaits my spirit too;
For the wrong that needs resistance,
For the cause that lacks assistance,
For the future in the distance,
And the good that I can do.

Very noble, but not enough. No, nor can any possible combination of these things be enough. Even to seek to serve God in them, as far as may be, is not enough. Paul's motto is briefer and goes much further, it saves life from the flavour of selfishness that pervades even the best of other answers, and supplies the motive power to fulfil all other aspirations. He had discerned the secret of living, and he declared that its highest reach was gained when his life was engrossed with Another. Simple, sublime, sufficient, by the inspiration of the Spirit, he speaks the master-word—CHRIST!

Christ, I am Christ's, and let the name suffice you,
Ay, and for me too He greatly hath sufficed,
Lo, with no winning words I would entice you,
Paul had no honour and no friend but Christ.

The true solution.

Life is weak if it is aimless. Better be definite even in a worldly way than merely be carried on the current of the time.

We are not driftwood on the wave,
But like the ships that tempests brave.

To have one true and good purpose is better than to be an opportunist with a dozen. Of Cobden it was said that he was a man of one idea. "Yes," retorted a friend of his, "but it is an IDEA." If the idea be great enough one is sufficient. When our soldiers were seeking to reclaim the Soudan they found that the Nile, hard by its junction with the Atbara, divided into two arms, with an island between them. At flood the gunboats got up the river, but afterwards the water was too low to

permit them to return. The problem was how to deepen the river so as to make it practicable at all seasons. The British Engineers deliberately built a pier across one of its branches, and when all the water was turned into the other branch their purpose was accomplished. The river became permanently deep and useful ; when it was narrowed it was deepened. Many a man to-day who is seeking to be everything everywhere would find that his life would be much more effective if he endeavoured to be something somewhere. Let us not seek to be broad at the price of being shallow. The one channel in which a human life may attain its greatest force and volume is—Christ.

And hence one master passion in the breast,
Like Aaron's serpent, swallows all the rest.

This implies, first, Belief in Christ. I believe that there is at this moment on the throne of God One who is my Saviour. He is God. But I believe He is a true man, a man like myself, that He has an actual human body as I have, that He died long ago as the sacrifice for my sins, that by that sacrifice He has put them away for ever, and now He is in glory as the Representative of all those who receive Him as their Redeemer, and as the Pledge that they too shall be brought safely home. Oh ! it is to me a most comfortable thought, that at the centre of the universe there is a Man, One who understands me, who sympathises with me, One who has power to save me to the uttermost. He is my Objective. I believe in Him. When I say, "To me to live is Christ," it means that.

It means also the Imitation of Christ. He has gone my way and I must follow. He only is my Example. Nothing is more perilous than to frame your life on the pattern of another man or woman. Life is too sensitive, too splendid, too unique to find its model anywhere but in Christ. When I say, "To me to live is Christ," I mean therefore that I seek to make His life the standard of mine.

It includes the Possession of Christ. It is not enough to know that Christ is yonder, and that He has left foot-prints here in which I may tread as I go to Him. Christ comes to me, He takes up His abode in my life, He pervades my being. "I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me." Surely it means that.

A great saint who has lately left us said, "There came a day when I died utterly, first to George Müller and then to my fellow-men." After that he became indifferent to what George Müller thought or wished, and indifferent to the approbation or blame of others: his one thought was to live for Christ. Now if I take that position, does it mean that I shall never please myself or be praised of men, that I shall cease to care for home or business, for culture or people? No, but it means that none of these things will be the end of my life. I shall do things not in order to be praised, or to escape blame, but I shall do them for Christ; then if praise comes or blame as the result, I shall not be unduly elated or cast down.

Brindley, the engineer, was once asked by a Committee of Parliament, what rivers were for, and quick as thought he gave the answer, "To feed canals." That was an

engineer's answer. Rivers to feed canals! Think of it! To feed canals! Of course rivers do feed canals but that is not what they are *for*, that is almost an accident. Rivers run to beautify the landscape, to irrigate the country, to drain the soil, to carry on their bosoms freights of blessing to the people who dwell on their banks, to seek the ocean from whence originally they came, and the last curve as they reach the sea is always the most beautiful. Yet the engineer said that they existed to feed the canals! What should be the purpose of your life? Business? Pleasure? Self? These things may be like the canals, but none of them should be the true purpose of life. Go higher. Let Christ be your All, then your life will be fair and noble, and its last curve as it nears the sea will be the loveliest.

Are you tempted to say that this is all very well for ministers who can let their life run in that direction, but it is hopeless to expect people in the rough and tumble of things to attain to it. Perhaps if you knew more of a minister's life you would find that it is almost as difficult for him to say, "To me to live is Christ," as for you to say it; that he has peculiar temptations of his own, chief among which is his very familiarity with Divine things. Indeed if a man is ten years in the ministry and retains his early fervour and devotion he is a miracle. It is as possible for you to write Christ over your life as for him, the same power avails for both. Christ is not to be a name, a profession, something to be kept only for your religious hours; His presence may be an atmosphere pervading you in all hours. All your life, artistic, practical, mental, mystical, may be filled with His

power. He demands no less than that, no less is implied in the text.

If you ask whether you in your life and business may have Christ everywhere and always the answer depends on two things. On you, and on your business. If your avocation is such that Christ must be shut out of it, the sooner you change it the better : if you are such a man that you cannot let Christ live in your life, you cannot too soon be other than you are.

Again, there is the Confession of Christ. Not only an occasional word of testimony, though this must not be withheld, but the glow through all your conversation and conduct that will be sure evidence of a deep devotion to the Master. A celebrated man, whom few suspected of being a believer in Christ, in his will wrote that he was a Christian, but that he had not confessed it in his life, because he had noticed that in his time the confession of Christ had been often the way up in the world. No doubt he thought it noble to refrain from that which might have brought to him some worldly advantage. But was it noble or mean? Did he never think of the honour his witness might have brought to Christ, or of the robbery of his reticence? It was contemptible pride that kept back the testimony. Confess Christ whether you lose or gain by it. He will gain, and that should be enough for you. Paul was not content with "living Christ," he put it down here for all time, telling it out as his proudest boast, "To me to live is Christ." If Christ is your life, it must not be only a heart-secret between you and your God. Loyalty demands that you should confess it before men.

Add to this, Service for Christ. The whole life of a saint is service, but in addition to the consecration of every detail, there may well be some direct work for the kingdom and glory of your Lord. This and more is included in the saying, "To me to live is Christ."

II. DYING.

Over the fairest and fullest life there lies the shadow of death, and one of the questions oftenest asked and most worthy of an answer is this, "What is it to die?"

How do you read the text? Many seem to think it runs, "To me to live is gain, and to die is Christ." If we might judge by their living, they imagine they can spend their strength in seeking the world, and at the end find Christ available for dying. Alas! how terribly many of them will be undeceived. They suppose that gain is godliness, not knowing that godliness with contentment is great gain.

But what is it to die? If we look only at the things that are seen we shall not give the answer of Paul. *To die is pain.* There is the pain of the dissolution, and there is pain of the parting, and many who are not afraid of the death are afraid of the dying. And indeed to die is pain.

To die is loss. The arm loses its vigour, the eye its lustre, the man loses his grip of things, the world his influence. To die is loss. And if when a saint dies his spirit is unconscious, if the next life is less active than this, then indeed to die is loss.

But Paul said, "To die is gain." A man in Christ loses nothing that is worth the keeping when he dies. But why gain? Now I am going to say a very simple thing,

and you can always tell a wise man from a foolish man when a simple thing is spoken. A foolish man will say, "Why, anybody could have thought of that!"; but if the man be wise he will say, "What a wonder I never thought of that before!" What then is the simple thing? This:—To die is gain first because it is more living, and secondly because it is more Christ.

It is more living.

A man who lives in Christ lives less and less in his body as the years go on, less and less in his soul, and more and more in his spirit. When death comes that eager fluttering spirit is loosed from its trammels, and goes free, able to live its life without restraint. It is more living than ever, death is triumph, and O Christian man—

To thee it is not
So much even as the lifting of a latch :
Only a step into the open air,
Out of a tent already luminous
With light that shines through its transparent walls !

It is more Christ.

He will be more known and nearer when we die than while we abide in the flesh. We shall see Him as He is. There will be more belief in Christ, faith will not die in sight and hope in full fruition, as they say so often in the prayer-meetings. You have not less faith in your friend the more you get to know him ; and when we stand in the presence of our glorious Lord we shall have more faith in Him than we have now. There will be more imitation of Christ ; we shall be like Him. More possession of Christ : more confession : more service. To

die will be gain, then, because there will be more of Christ.

When the Revised New Testament was being published, there lay a girl at the point of death who had solaced her heart with the text which comes two verses after ours. "To be with Christ, which is far better." They told her that there would be many changes in the new translation, and a great fear came upon her that her text would disappear. When they brought her the New Testament, she found, as she had expected, that it was altered, but, as she did not expect, it was made even more emphatic by the change: it now read, "To be with Christ, which is very far better," and straightway she fell to praising the Lord: her fears were stilled, and she eagerly waited for the passing. Oh, believe me, men and women, if you can say, "To me to live is Christ," you need have no terror of death. It is quite an easy thing to die. The more deathbeds I see of those who are the Lord's, the easier it seems. "To die is gain." For a child of God all that lies beyond "is very far better."

We are thus in a strait betwixt two.

Both living and dying are splendid, for both are Christ. But if the death be gain, we may be tempted to think that the sooner we die the better. Let us remember, however, that the man who lives Christ will never wish to die before Christ wills. To rush unbidden into the Unseen is not gain, for the man who madly flings himself over the precipice but proves that for him to live was not Christ; had it been, he would have patiently waited until Christ called him. If it is not Christ here, it is not gain there.

But for the saint indeed it is gain. The early Christians rejoiced in death. Not in all the fifty miles of Catacombs (or is it two hundred miles?) is there a trace of mourning, in the inscriptions there is nothing but jubilation because their beloved, the children of God, have got safely home. In those pagan times they were more Christian than many of us who in these Christian times in our views of death, and in our funeral customs, are almost pagan.

See how this man looked at it. He introduces a new word, which lights up his thought, "Having a desire to *depart*," a word that is only once again used in the New Testament, in Luke xii. 36, where it is rendered "return." If it were Anglicised it would be our word "analysis"; that of course is not the translation, but it is almost exactly the word, which has reference in it to the unmooring of a ship. "Having a desire to be unmoored." As if he were a ship now in the dock, a ship which can never fulfil its destiny until it is out on the sea. "Having a desire to be unmoored."

There was in the London Law Courts recently a case which turned on the question whether a ship in the dock was part of the dock or not. It arose under the new Compensation Act, and the question was whether the owners of the dock, or of the ship, were responsible for an accident. After learned and lengthy argument it was adjudged that a ship in the dock is part of the dock. But is it? You know perfectly well that it is quite distinct from the dock, it is afloat in its own element and is only moored to the dockside. Yet British law says it is part of the dock. It is, and it is not. And I am like that

ship. I am part of the world and yet I am apart from it. I am made for another life, and already I am in it, even the life that is eternal. It is true I am moored to the dock by my chain of flesh : I wait that I may take in my cargo. But the day will come when I shall be ready to enter upon the real living. When the preparation shall be over, and

All my powers find sweet employ, in that eternal world of joy.

I belong to Christ. He is Owner and Captain. Yet I have never seen Him. I believe in Him, and I am entirely at His disposal, yet have I never seen Him. To me to live is Christ whom I love not having seen, but the day of the unmooring will come, the day to which I look forward with great desire. I shall cast off the last rope that binds me to the shore, I shall go down the river, my freed spirit shall bound forward like a ship under full sail, my true life, the life of which all that goes before is but the preface, shall begin,

For though from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face,
When I have crost the bar.

X

IMMORTALITY THE FINAL GIFT

“This mortal shall have put on immortality.”—1 COR. xv. 54.

WE greatly dare in attempting to discuss a subject which has perplexed many of the acutest minds that have been given to the study of Divine things. Every mind will be perplexed that seeks to walk among the future things unaided, for of ourselves we know absolutely nothing of what lies beyond death: the curtain falls resolutely when the spirit passes, and the mourner waits without, uncomforted, unless God in His goodness reveal something to assuage our sorrow. For some wise reason we have not been told much of that other world into which so many of our beloved have departed and into which we ourselves must so speedily pass. If we attempt therefore to gather up the hints and half-words that have been given to us we must do so with deep humility of mind, and great tenderness of spirit. Richard Baxter, in lines familiar to most

of us, has expressed what every reverent heart must feel :—

My knowledge of that life is small,
The eye of faith is dim ;
But 'tis enough that Christ knows all,
And I shall be with Him.

But small knowledge is still knowledge, and if this text were all we had we should be able to look out on the future with assurance of hope. Beyond the bliss that death brings to the believer, rest from labour, reunion with our beloved, and delight in God, there is another bliss. The triumph of Christ, and the fulfilment of our destiny will not be complete until the Resurrection. “ *When* this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, *then* shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.” When? Then. In prospect of that day we now exult with glad thanksgiving. “Not that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.”

The two words in the verse where the text lies embedded, “incorruption” and “immortality,” are closely related, and yet they are as clearly distinct. The word “immortal” we only find once again in the New Testament ; the word “incorruption,” in various forms, occurs five times in this chapter, and eight times besides in the New Testament. Thrice it is mistranslated “immortal,” 1 Timothy i. 17, “The King eternal, immortal,” where the reading should be “incorruptible” ; 2 Timothy i. 10, “Our Saviour Jesus Christ has brought life and im-

mortality to light," it should be "incorruption"; Romans ii. 7 should also read "to them who seek for glory, honour, and incorruption, eternal life." Twice it is rendered "sincerity," and in the other passages when it is translated as in the text "incorruption," it refers to incorruptible seed, inheritance, crown and body. The difference between the two ideas may be best manifested when we remember that Christ saw mortality, for He died; but He saw no corruption.

In speaking of "*Immortality*," it is important then to remember that reference is only made to it in two Scripture passages—twice here, and once in another place to which we will turn presently. It is equally important to bear in mind that "immortal" is the correlative term of "mortal." It means "not mortal." To be mortal is to be subject to death, to be immortal is not to be subject to death. Do not let us be moved away from these plain facts; together they are the clue which may bring us out of the maze.

We begin then by saying—

I. IMMORTALITY IS THE HIGHEST STATE OF BEING.

None of us yet possess it. This is true to experience and to Scripture.

To say that man is naturally immortal is to contradict both. We know that man dies; if he were immortal he could not die: we are told that man is to receive immortality at the Resurrection; if he had it already he could not receive it then.

To say that the soul of man is immortal is to confuse things that differ. Whatever happens to the man happens to the whole man. Man is mortal. Man dies,

the whole man dies. Do not shrink from this conclusion; I think you will be glad to accept it before we have done.

Immortality then is given at the Resurrection to those who have died, and it is not given until then. If that be true, we shall expect that the Man, the only man who has already been raised from the dead, should be a sharer in this gift: that is precisely what we find. "Death hath no more dominion over Him," and it is written of Him in 1 Timothy vi. 16, "Who only hath immortality." So immortality is something which now only Christ has, something which is to be shared by all the saints at a day yet future. It is the highest, the final gift. Those who receive it will never die any more. It is a gift which Adam did not possess, else he could not have died, which none of us possess as yet, else for us too death would be impossible. A man who can die is not immortal.

Immortality is given to those who possess eternal life.

Eternal life is not immortality, nor is it merely natural life indefinitely prolonged. Neither is it only endless existence. It is the gift of God to all who believe on Jesus Christ, and it is given when we believe. We do not come into possession of eternal life when we go to heaven, but when we go to Christ. As immortality is something which only Christ has, but something that is to be shared by all the saints, eternal life is something the saints have which may be shared by all the world. It is a life which in quality and essence differs from the natural life of man—a life that links us to God, that makes us partakers of the Divine nature, that in effect is

"Christ in us," for He is that Eternal Life which was with the Father and which was manifested unto us. The last Adam was made a quickening Spirit ; in Him was life and the life was the light of men. Weigh this well. You do not possess immortality, but you may possess eternal life, which is the pledge of it. Do you possess eternal life? If not, you are spiritually dead in trespasses and in sins.

Eternal life is given to those who possess natural life.

Perfect life, which includes the natural or physical, and the spiritual or eternal, has two hands. The soul of man exists between spirit and body. The spirit takes conscious hold on God and on things unseen, the body takes conscious hold on earth and on the things seen. A regenerate man has this double consciousness, but a man who has not received the eternal life has but the life that is natural and earthly, the residue of life. This natural life, like all life, is a state of existence. Of course it is also a force that moulds us, but for the present we are only concerned in knowing that life is a condition of existence, and that all men, saints and sinners, possess this natural or physical life.

Behind all these, there is existence.

Nowhere are we told that existence is given to a man. The reason is self-evident. Every man exists. When he is born he begins to be. Nowhere are we told that existence is taken from a man. Why? Because it is never taken from him. He always is.

When a man dies he does not cease to be. Life is a state of existence, death is also a state of existence.

When a man who has eternal life dies, he ceases to be in touch with the things which the natural life grasps, but the eternal life which gives him touch with God continues. When a man who has only natural life dies he ceases to be in touch with the things around him ; he never was in touch with God, so he goes unclothed into the void. But he still exists. We see all around us that men without eternal life nevertheless exist ; if our vision were clearer we would see that men without natural life exist too. If the man *with* eternal life exists after bodily death, the man without it exists too. Death is a condition of existence just as life is.

His body ! It exists, that is why you require to have a funeral.

His spirit ! It exists, for we are expressly told it is to have a resurrection. If it did not exist it might be recreated, but it certainly could not be resurrected. There can be no resurrection of that which does not exist.

But is it perfectly certain that all men are to have a resurrection ? Our only source of knowledge is the Word of God. What then saith the Scripture ? In Romans xiv. 12 we read, "So then every one of us shall give account of himself unto God." Every one of us ; mark that. Turn back to Acts xxiv. 15, and it is written, "There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust." The just and the unjust ; mark that. But if you idly object that these are the words of Paul, though I receive them as the words of the Holy Ghost, yet we need only turn a few pages back to John v. 29, and we shall read the very words of

Jesus, "All that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth : they that have done good unto the resurrection of life ; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of judgment." Language cannot make it clearer.

All the dead shall be raised. They cannot be raised if they do not exist, therefore all dead men exist. They may not have eternal life, but they exist. None of them have immortality, but they exist. Existence is not life, and life is not immortality, and we see that of life there are two kinds. Man begins his existence in a condition of natural life ; he may rise to eternal life, and thence to immortality, or he may sink to death and to all that death involves. The issue is tremendous.

II. IMMORTALITY IS VICTORY OVER DEATH.

Not until the saints have their mortality clothed with immortality shall the saying be fulfilled, "Death is swallowed up in victory." Then it will be gloriously and everlastingly true.

Death is not extinction of being.

It is separation. Spiritual death is separation from God and from the spiritual world. Natural death is the separation of body from spirit, and the separation of the atoms of the body one from the other. To lose God is to be dead on that side, and to lose contact with earth is to be dead on that side. In the day Adam sinned he died—died spiritually. He lost correspondence with God, and that ultimately entailed the other separation of himself into his elements. Sin that separated man from God will also, ere it is finished, separate soul from body. I repeat then that death is not extinction, it is not

ceasing to be, it is not annihilation, it is a state of existence, just as life is.

Death and Life are Correlative terms.

I should like to say "opposite terms," in order to be better understood, but the wisdom of the schools would be offended. Death is to be placed in opposition to Life, and not in opposition to anything else: that is a simple thing to remember, but it is a thing that is nearly always forgotten when we speak of these mysteries: half the arguments about the future life are based on the misconception. We have seen that life and existence are not synonymous. Now death is the correlative of life, not the correlative of existence. Extinction is the correlative of existence. There are four terms to express the four ideas — Immortality, Eternal Life, Natural Life, and Existence.

Mortality is to be placed in relation to Immortality.

Eternal death opposite Eternal life.

Natural death as against Natural life.

Opposite Existence, what? Nothing. If anything, it would be Extinction, but there is no extinction of the human soul. If there were, it would surely become extinct at death, and we have just seen that death is not extinction.

When a man loses life he is dead. He is all dead, body and soul are both dead, for each is severed from the other. The man is dead as a man. That does not mean that anything ceases to be, it only implies that everything exists in new relations. Death is not the correlative of Existence but of Life. When a man dies it means that he ceases to live, not that he ceases to

exist. To speak, therefore, of the "immortal soul" is a misuse of terms; the ever-existent soul, the ever-sentient soul, the ever-conscious soul, would be expressions true to fact, but if the soul can die it is not immortal. But you say the soul never dies. I know we talk of the never-dying soul; but we mean something different to what we say. Death is not extinction, we mean that the soul is never extinct, do we not? The soul dies when it is separated from the body, just as the body dies when it is separated from the soul. Neither of them ceases to be, but both cease to be in the condition in which they were. That is death. Believers who fall asleep are spoken of in Scripture as being dead, but the statement is always qualified (except on one occasion, when there is a reason for the exception), by the addition of the words "in the Lord," or "in Christ." They are really dead on the earth side, though they are alive towards Christ. Remember, then, that the word death is the correlative of the word life, and of no other word: it will save you from many a false thought.

The spirit of man has a continuous identity.

Death is separation. When the body is reduced by death to its elements, earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes, I cannot but think there is great force in the old argument that the soul itself is an element. When it is separated from the body it can be resolved into nothing other than itself, and it will exist with all its capacities, experiences and powers. The soul is independent of any body. Since I first stood in this pulpit in the year 1884 I have had, if we may believe physiologists, two distinct bodies, atom by atom

they have changed twice ; but I am the same man, I have the same identity. My soul has been separated from that old body, but it has chosen another, and is independent of both. Every man is a sculptor, his life shows in his face and form, the soul here clothes itself with an appropriate body, and during earthly life passes that on again and again for another. When at length it shuffles off this mortal coil altogether, it will go forth still a soul, one and indivisible.

Man was created with capacity for endless conscious existence.

In making this statement we go one step further. Though it is never made in the Bible, it is almost self-evident, and self-evident things are not proved in Scripture, they are taken for granted. Plato reasoned well about it. Man has powers which never find play here ; the better the man the greater those powers, and the stronger the longing for a fit sphere of action. If man has had an intelligent Creator surely these faculties and aptitudes are to find scope somewhere. The bird in its shell the day before the hatching feels its wings, and if it reasoned that being endowed with such power it was not always meant to stay in its shell it would be right in its argument. The *Oceanic* is floated off the stocks into the river Lagan : men come down and wonder at its intricate mechanism, its complicated appliances for voyaging over the sea : were they to be told that in spite of appearances the splendid ship was intended only to lie in the river pool, they would laugh in derision. It is not considered necessary to give assurance that the ship is for the sea, it is apparent to everybody that she has

been built expressly for that purpose. If man is not capable of conscious existence beyond the life of earth there has been great waste in his creation, for he feels within him that he has ample powers for another world ;

Like thoughts, whose very sweetness yieldeth proof,
That they were born for immortality.

If he is not to continue his being it is a mistake to educate himself for this world, for the more worthy he makes his life here the greater longing he will have for the life beyond, and the greater will be his disappointment. In that case the least worthy life is the most sensible, which, as Euclid says, is absurd.

We conclude that even without life the soul will exist. We know no other existence but life, but there is another. The soul with all its capacities will survive the machinery. When the two are separated—body severed from soul—both will exist, but without life neither will be operative. If not a possessor of eternal life, the human spirit will then possess no life, but with all its yearnings and powers it will exist, exist and be unable to satisfy any of them. It may perhaps look on the wreck of the body from which it has been ejected and long to return to it that it may live ; the unclothed demons were glad even to enter into the swine. But if the man is a possessor of the life that is eternal, the spirit will rest in God and in Christ, awaiting the day when it shall be clothed upon with its spiritual body, and again be brought into touch with things that are capable of being seen and handled. Then the man will be wholly alive, alive to God, and alive to created things ; with the body

the soul will reach down to one, and with the spirit it will reach up to the other. But shall he ever again die? He may, if he be not made a partaker of the final gift, Immortality—Deathlessness. That, too, shall be the portion of the saints. “This mortal shall have put on immortality.”

III. IMMORTALITY IS THE RESURRECTION GIFT.

All who are raised from the dead shall receive natural life.

Resurrection is not the bestowal of being, not the gift of existence. That would be creation. It is the raising of that which is, and the restoration of a body like unto that of which death deprives us. In the resurrection, body and soul shall again be united. Those who are joined to Christ shall receive a glorious body like unto His own, but all shall have an appropriate vehicle for the soul. I do not say that all shall be raised at the same time; Paul, writing to the Philippians (iii. 11), longed for a resurrection “out from among the dead,” and we are expressly told that there is a first resurrection, but the scriptures we have already quoted make it clear that all men shall again be raised from the dead.

But Eternal Life is not the Resurrection Gift.

It is the gift now offered in Christ; if not received in the flesh it cannot be received at all. Many have accepted this gift and rejoice in it: we do not know all it means, but daily we are making discoveries of its delight. Oh, that others might take the gift to-day!

Those who have Eternal Life shall then receive the crowning gift of Immortality.

Lest man should put forth his hand and take of the Tree of Life, and live for ever in his sins, he was driven out of the garden ; but the Tree of Life is in the midst of the Paradise of God. Raised from the dead, and truly living, then, and not till then, shall man receive "Deathlessness." It would be impossible to bestow the gift sooner. We could not get it now, for we are dying ; first we must die, or be changed. The dead in Christ could not get it now, for though they are living towards God in Christ, still they are dead ; now they are "the spirits of just men made perfect," then they shall be perfect men. They shall have won their immortality, and they shall die no more. "So when this corruption shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then"—and not until then—"shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'" That is a culmination worth aiming at, is it not ? an end devoutly to be desired. It may be yours by the faith of Christ.

Those who stand without Eternal Life will miss their Immortality.

It would be no boon to them to render them immortal when they know not God, and without eternal life they will not be capable of knowing God.

What shall happen to them ? It is not thinkable that they shall be annihilated. If that were possible, why are they not annihilated when they die ? If the spirit can cease to exist it will certainly cease to exist at death. But it is quite certain it does not then cease to exist, and it therefore follows, as the night the day, that it never ceases to exist.

What shall happen to them? Shall they be purged and restored? There is no room for purgatory, for it is not a question of gradual advancement, but of the bestowal of an absolute gift. If you will not receive that gift here, you will not have the opportunity of rejecting it there. And God will not force it upon man: that would be to lose men in saving them.

What shall happen to them? There is only one answer in the Book. *They shall again die.* "Blessed and holy is he that hath his part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power." The second death hath therefore power over all the rest. We read in the twentieth chapter of Revelation again, "Death and hell were cast into the lake of fire: this is the second death; and whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." And again in the next chapter we are solemnly warned that "the fearful and the unbelieving and others shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."

What does the second death mean? Does it not mean, cannot it mean anything other than that the danger from which Immortality saves the saints, shall be the immediate doom of the unsaved?

The saints shall be rejoicing in the fulness of eternal life, and in the new resurrection gift of bodily life, both assured to them for ever, while those having no eternal life, but standing there in their mortal bodies, the dead small and great before the great white throne—these shall again die. O rejector of Christ as the Redeemer and the Life of man, you are afraid to die once, think

what it will be to die, actually to die, twice! The wicked dead shall not cease to exist, but they shall cease to live. Death is the correlative term of life, not of existence. They shall die, that is, there again shall be a separation of soul and body. Oh the horror of it! They shall die! They chose to continue in spiritual death, they shall take the penalty in bodily death. Apart from God they shall henceforth be apart from the body that would enable them to express the emotions of the soul. They shall die! -

Memory, Tendency, Desire, Character all remaining, but no God and no body left. That, I believe, is the lake of fire. That is the second death. It is no fancy picture. It is a real danger, a thing to fear, a thing from which to flee. Think what it will be, having had one experience of death, to have a brief respite for judgment, and again to have body and soul torn asunder, to have thoughts and wishes, and to be deprived of a body that would enable you to gratify any of them. To will and to be unable to do, the accumulations of your life urging you forward in the direction you have chosen and all progress barred. O man, be warned! that is the second death.

The only escape is now to become a possessor of eternal life. It is offered you as the Gift of God in Christ. If you receive it, you may one day die in the body, but you will be dead in Christ, and your body united to Him will rest in the grave till the resurrection. And while death reigns as tyrant over unbelievers, you shall certainly have a resurrection of life. You shall

receive the Gift of Immortality from Him who only hath it now, but who will give this crown of life to all who love His appearing—the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, to whom be praise for evermore!

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